

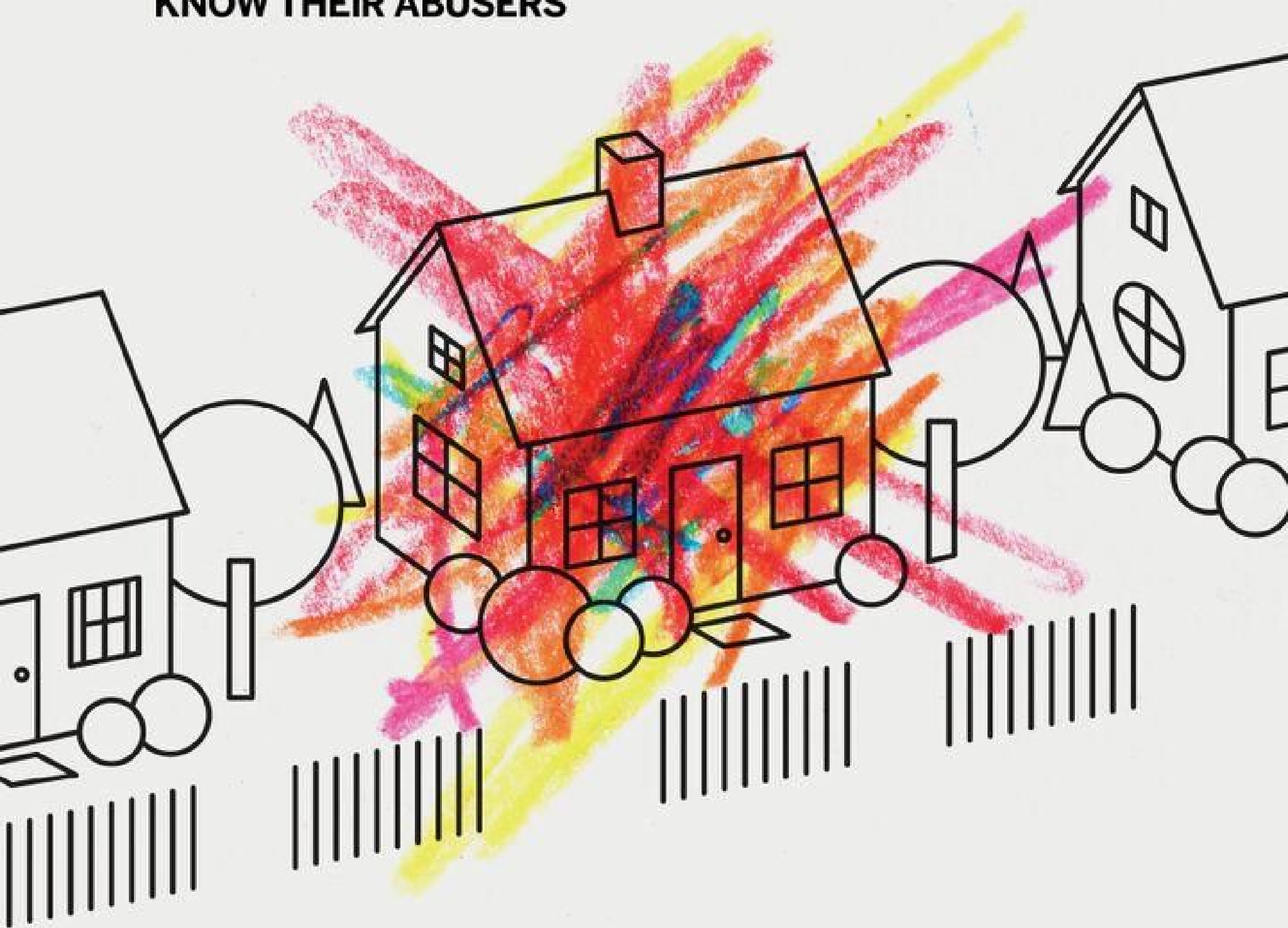
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Newsweek

07.03.2015

THE PREDATOR NEXT DOOR

NEARLY ALL CHILDREN
WHO ARE SEXUALLY ABUSED
KNOW THEIR ABUSERS



Newsweek

FEATURES



*THE HUNT
FOR
CHILD SEX
ABUSERS IS
HAPPENING
IN THE
WRONG
PLACES*

When it comes to child abuse, fear everyone but the stranger.

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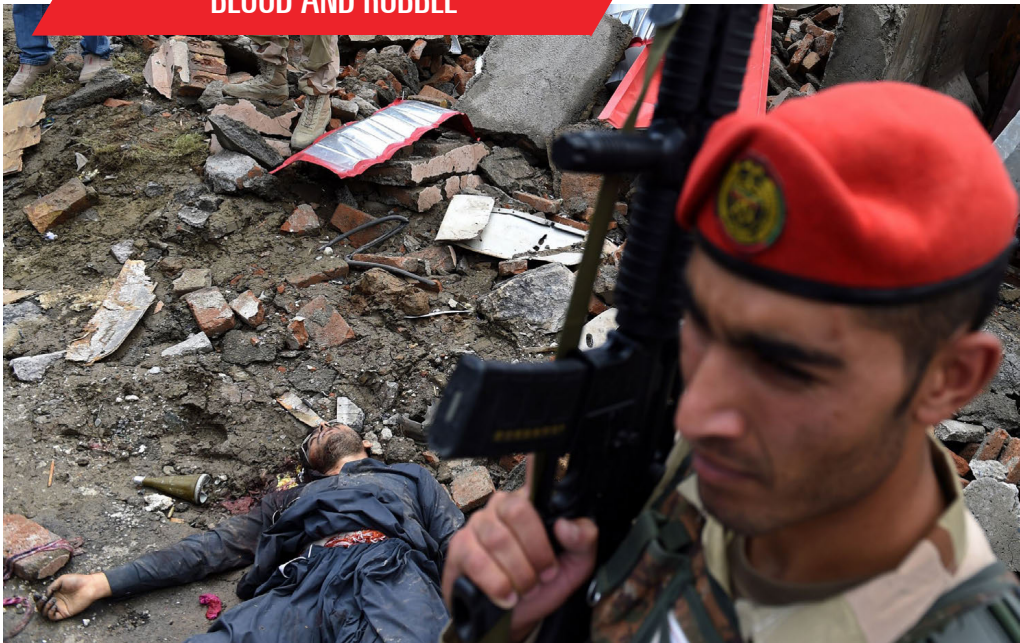
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THE HUNT FOR CHILD SEX ABUSERS IS HAPPENING IN THE WRONG PLACES

**WHEN IT COMES TO CHILD ABUSE, FEAR EVERYONE
BUT THE STRANGER.**

It's late March when Lauren Book and I head into the bowels of the Florida Civil Commitment Center (FCCC), armed with loose-leaf paper, pencils and the knowledge that we are about to sit face to face with three of the most

dangerous sexually violent predators in the state. “This is the most manipulative crowd on the planet,” says Kristin Kanner, director of the Florida Department of Children and Families’ Sexually Violent Predator Program. And one of the men we’re seeing today has been sending Book and her father angry letters for the past few years.

The FCCC is surrounded by seemingly endless stretches of sugar fields, cow pastures and orange groves. Wrapped in 12-foot barbed wire fences and guarded with more than 200 cameras, it is where Florida keeps 640 of its worst sexually violent offenders. About half have committed crimes against just children, a third against just adults.

Visits like ours are rare. Aside from prosecutors, defense attorneys and legislators, the last time anyone from the general public was granted this kind of FCCC access was in 2013, Book’s first visit. Her father, Ron Book, routinely referred to as one of the most powerful lobbyists in Florida, was not happy about that trip. “I just don’t like exposing her to the population,” he explains. “These are people one step away from killing a kid. People who stole children’s childhoods.”

Lauren Book, who’s 30, is one of over 42 million adult survivors of child sexual abuse in the U.S. For six years, starting when she was 11, her family’s live-in nanny sexually abused her. Today, she teaches children, parents and educators about child sexual abuse and prevention through her nonprofit, **Lauren’s Kids**. “There was a prevailing thought that child sexual abuse only happened in those neighborhoods over there, with those kids, not in our private school, in our gated community,” says Book, who grew up in a wealthy part of South Florida. “It was important to say, ‘Yes, it does happen to blond-haired, green-eyed kids who go to the university school.’”



Lauren Book, who was sexually abused by her nanny over a five-year period, visits the Florida Civil Commitment Center, a facility for post-incarceration treatment for convicted sexual offenders. Florida is among the harshest states in regards to punishment for sex offenders, and requires those it deems a potential repeat offender to stay at the center for additional time following their jail sentence. Credit: Omar Vega/Lauren's Kids

When we walk into the FCCC's main entrance, the first thing we see is a large poster announcing a sexual-abuse awareness fundraiser among residents and staff. Book, Claire VanSusteren (communications director of Lauren's Kids) and I had already agreed to background checks, so all that was left to do was present our IDs to the guard and hand over our personal belongings. We walk through a metal detector and into an interior hallway, where a reassuringly large security guard leads us to the visiting room. "Do you stay for the interviews?" I ask, hoping his answer is yes. He nods.

The room is large and sterile, with white tables, blue chairs and vending machines pushed up against one wall. Defense attorney Jeanine Cohen; Brian Mason, a lawyer with the FCCC; and the security guard sit nearby, but it's clear that Book, VanSusteren and I will be the ones sharing

a table with each of the sex offenders. I immediately flash to a piece of advice an expert gave me: “Odds are, in a facility you’ll be safe. But don’t let [the sex offenders] sit between you and the door.” He added, as if reading my mind, “It’s right out of the movie—Hannibal Lecter!”

In Florida, it’s legal to lock up sex offenders after they’ve served their sentences, as long as they’ve been deemed too dangerous to rejoin society. The process, called civil commitment, has existed here since 1999, when the Jimmy Ryce Act took effect in honor of a 9-year-old boy who was abducted on his way home from school, then raped, decapitated and dismembered. When sex offenders complete their time in prison, Florida’s Sexually Violent Predator Program reviews their cases, looking for evidence of “a mental abnormality or personality disorder—something that makes them likely to reoffend,” Kanner says.

[Related: U.S. Arrests 1,140, Including 3 Soldiers, on Child Sexual Predation Charges]

Once civilly committed, residents spend six to seven years, sometimes longer, undergoing extensive treatment, and they need to show rehabilitation before they are considered for release. While it’s unlikely someone would be let out without participating in treatment, special situations do occur—as when a resident is “severely medically compromised,” Kanner says, or “‘ages’ out of the risk to reoffend.” For some residents, refusing treatment means spending the rest of their lives inside those 12-foot barbed wire fences.

Today, civil commitment is legal in 20 states and under federal law, and it’s deeply controversial. “If you ask any psychologist involved in [civil commitment], they’ll tell you that treatment is the only thing we know that will change someone,” says Kanner. Since 1998, 932 sex offenders have been civilly committed at the FCCC, and on average, 85 percent of them opt for treatment. “Research shows that sex offenders who receive specialized treatment services

reoffend at lower rates than those who don't get treatment," says Jill Levenson, an associate professor of social work at Barry University who researches sex offender policy and treatment. "Is it perfect? No. Treatment doesn't work equally for everyone. People die after getting chemo, but we don't say it doesn't treat cancer."

Indeed, the civil commitment system doesn't always work as it's supposed to. A recent [investigation](#) by the Sun Sentinel found that over a 14-year period, Florida considered committing but then released 594 sex offenders who were later convicted of other sex crimes. These men went on to molest over 460 children, rape 121 women and kill 14, the Sun Sentinel reported. The rate of recidivism among child sexual abusers is 13 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and research shows that sex offenders with stable jobs, housing and social supports are far less likely to reoffend. Yet Florida does not offer supervision programs to offenders after they are released from the FCCC. "They're just let out, which I think is counterintuitive and counterproductive," says Kanner. "You're setting them up for failure."

Civil commitment is also expensive—the FCCC cost \$62 million to build and now needs about \$24 million a year to operate. In 2010, the 20 states with civil commitment programs spent nearly \$500 million on 5,200 offenders, according to an [Associated Press analysis](#). Another concern is that civil commitment violates offenders' rights. In Minnesota, a federal judge recently ruled that the state's sex offender treatment program, which holds more than 700 people, is unconstitutional. Since the program launched in the 1990s, no one has been fully discharged.

David Lisak, board president of [lin6](#), a nonprofit for male victims of child sexual abuse, is a leading psychologist who studies child sexual abuse and non-stranger rape. "What frightens me," he says, "is when I see people winking at each other so we can all pretend this really does pass

constitutional muster, because—wink, wink—we’re treating these people for a mental illness, when the same people will tell you in the next breath, especially off the record, that they view these people as untreatable.”

A man starts walking toward Book, VanSusteren and me. We don’t know much about him other than he’s 51 years old and his public record includes two offenses, one for kidnapping and the other for lewdly fondling, assaulting, or committing or simulating sexual acts on or in the presence of a minor. Since he asked to remain anonymous, I’ll call him Jesse. His shiny bald head, thin mouth and short-sleeved collared shirt make him look more like a wimpy uncle than one of the state’s most dangerous predators. Book stands up, extends her hand and says, “Thank you for taking the time to talk with us.”

“Anything to give back to the community and advocate for the kids,” he says, shaking her hand, then mine and then VanSusteren’s.

We sit down, and Jesse adjusts his chair, smiling hesitantly. “What led you here?” Book says.

“My awareness,” he says, sounding as if he’s regurgitating treatment literature. “Realizing the pain I’ve caused in my victims’ lives and in their families and communities. Everyone is affected. I didn’t want to come here, but I knew I needed help.” He explains that he was raped at 13, sexually abused by his brothers and beaten by his father for over a decade. Later, he drank. “Offenders don’t go out and rape someone because a lady in the bar won’t have sex with them. Realize [that] there’s always something going on in that person’s life that they never addressed.”

When he talks about his father’s abuse, his mouth starts quivering. “Feeling that inadequate, I didn’t know how to ask for help. My dad always taught me to resolve things through anger, and I became a master at that. I’d go to any

length to get what I needed.” It dawns on me that Jesse was exactly the kind of child Book now works so hard to reach.

He looks at us with hazel eyes that seem to be getting bigger, sadder and wetter with each second, and as I scribble down his words, I remember something Kanner told me a few days earlier: “Listen to what they say with a grain of salt. Most psychopaths are very charming. You want to like them.”

‘That’s What I Did Wrong’

Growing up, Lauren Book was the eldest and self-professed “goody two-shoes” of the three children. Her father was often traveling or working long hours, and her mother was busy running a chocolate shop. As she writes in her memoir, *It’s OK to Tell: A Story of Hope and Recovery*, she often dreamt about breaking her leg “so I could be the center of attention for a day.”



Lauren Book as a young child. She was sexually abused from the age of 11 to 17, and now helps raise awareness about child abuse, and advocates for rehabilitation for pedophiles. Credit: Book family

Then her parents hired Waldina Flores through a reputable nanny agency. At first, Flores doted on Book, giving her extra dessert, letting her stay up late and telling her how pretty she was. This is called grooming: A predator identifies his or her prey—typically a lonely, shy child whose parents aren’t paying attention—and showers him or her with special attention. Book latched on to Flores as a surrogate parent. “Love and consistency and stability, that’s all I wanted in my entire life,” Book says.

One day, Flores told her to stop chewing gum. “I said in my 11-year-old sassiness, ‘What are you gonna do about

it?” Book recalls. “She proceeded to stick her tongue in my mouth and take the gum with her tongue.” The abuse escalated from there.

Over the next six years, Flores performed oral sex on Book and forced Book to do the same on her. She penetrated her young victim with vegetables and forks, threw her down a flight of stairs and urinated and defecated on her. Flores was so controlling, she chose Book’s clothes, did her hair and picked which feminine hygiene products she could use. “She wanted me to use pads because she wanted to be the only thing inside me,” Book says. Flores also convinced her that they were going to get married and have children one day. The sexual, physical and emotional abuse occurred daily, in bedrooms, bathrooms and closets, often with Book’s parents and siblings in the next room.



Lauren Book, right, with her nanny Waldina Flores, who was convicted of sexually abusing Book and subjecting her to years of rape, physical beatings and emotional abuse. Credit: Barcroft Media/Getty

“Waldina didn’t hurt me 24 hours a day. If it was an hour a day and 23 hours being wonderful, it doesn’t make the one hour less bad, but that’s what I had to pay for being

loved and having consistency,” Book says. “To be honest, the trade-off was OK.”

Book was 17 when she told her boyfriend about the abuse, then her therapist and finally her father. “My dad is not a crying person,” she says. “He was hunched over and said, ‘I’m sorry, Pip. I’m so sorry.’ I knew that it was gonna be OK. It would be over, and I didn’t have to do it anymore. Those were three of the best words in my life: I’m sorry, Pip.”

Book was lucky; many parents side with the abuser, especially if it’s a spouse or family member, or they are immobilized by guilt for bringing a predator into their family. Ron Book immediately filed a police report and forced Flores out of their home. She was arrested three months later in Oklahoma City, where she’d gotten a volunteer job coaching a girls’ soccer team. In January 2002, the Books offered Flores a plea deal of 10 years in prison. Her response (through her attorney): “Please tell Mr. Book to go fuck himself.”

Ten months later, just one day before Book’s 18th birthday—the same day the trial was set to begin—Flores decided she wanted to take the original 10-year offer. “On behalf of Mr. Book, no deal and please tell Ms. Flores to go fuck herself,” Ron Book said through his lawyer. Flores ended up accepting a 15-year sentence for child molestation charges and had to apologize in open court. In 2004, she received an additional 10 years when she wrote Book love letters from prison, violating an order not to contact her.

Even after Flores was arrested, Book’s suffering continued—anorexia, self-mutilation, depression, sleepless nights, post-traumatic stress disorder. Her recovery stretched out over years, and she still experiences night terrors. Even her upcoming wedding this summer carries an extra heavy weight: She may never be able to carry a baby to term due to the scarring from Flores’s abuse.

Despite all this, Book considers herself one of the lucky ones. “I have tremendous support from my family, and without them I couldn’t do this. I wouldn’t have lived,” she says. “Those really tough years made me the person I am today—not just living through them but living beyond them.”

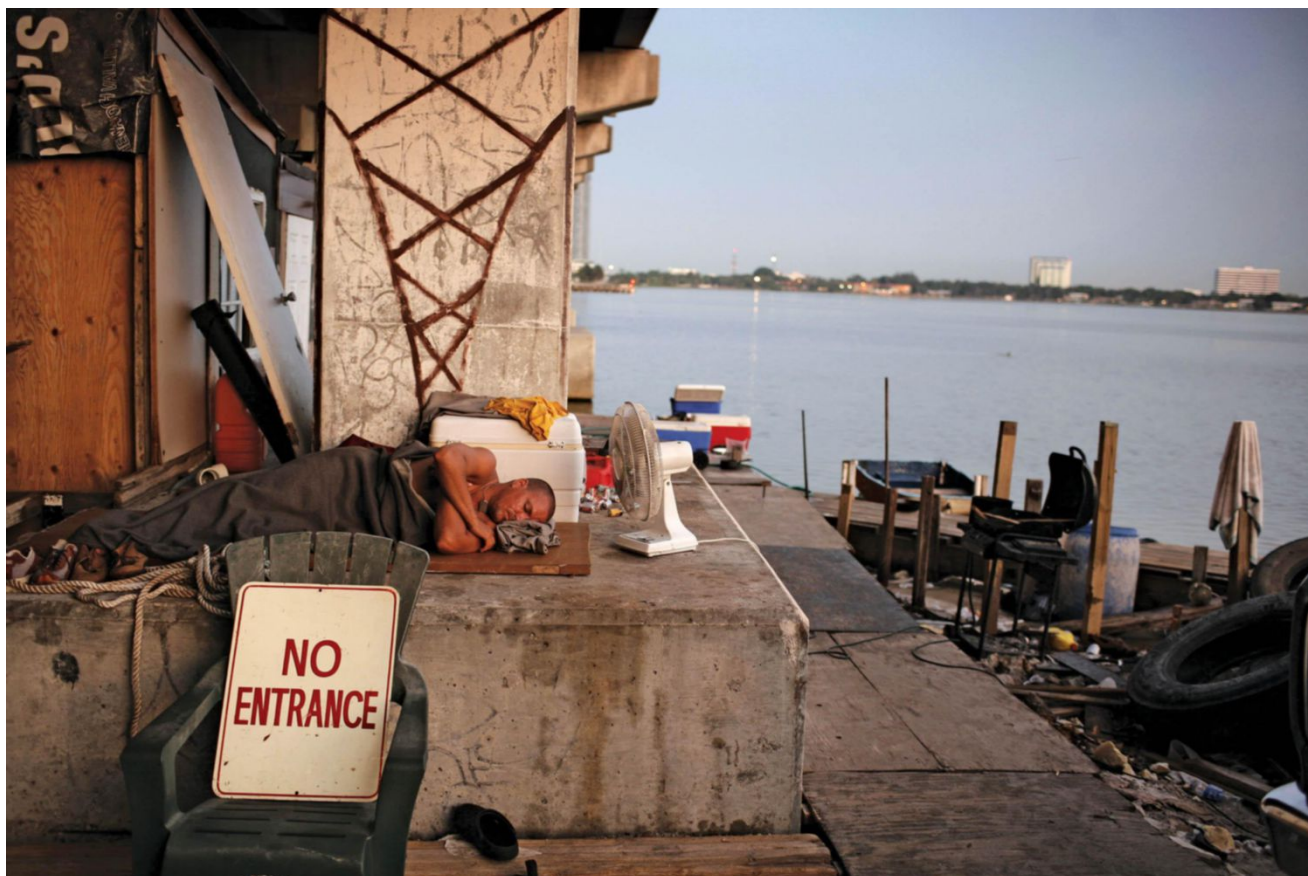
This year marks Book’s sixth annual **Walk in My Shoes**, a 1,500-mile, monthlong journey that takes her and tens of thousands of survivors and supporters from Key West to Tallahassee. Her robust education curricula, Safer, Smarter Kids, is in over 16,000 kindergarten and pre-K classrooms across Florida and select schools in New York, California, Georgia and Illinois, and across the Caribbean through a partnership with UNICEF. Experts don’t always agree on the success of such educational programs, yet testing shows that Book’s has improved kids’ safety knowledge by 77 percent.

Ron Book, who still cries when he talks about everything his daughter endured, has spent more than a decade transforming Florida’s sex offender laws, making it one of the harshest states for sex offenders. Along with his daughter, he has been an advocate for nearly two dozen legislative victories. As Levenson puts it, “If Lauren Book had been shot by somebody, we would have very different gun laws in Florida. If she was hit by a drunk driver, we would have very different drunk driving laws.”



Ronald Book, a powerful Florida lobbyist, and his daughter, Lauren Book, in their home on June 19, 2009 in Miami. Credit: Charles Ommanney/Getty

“Not too long ago, the penalty in Florida for failure to report animal abuse carried a stiffer penalty than failing to report child abuse,” Ron Book says. Legislation he lobbied for made it mandatory for all Floridians—not just parents or guardians—to report known or suspected child abuse. Those who fail to do so are charged with a third-degree felony, and colleges and universities face up to a \$1 million fine for not reporting. He also advocated for laws that make it a crime for convicted felony offenders to contact victims or their families (the Lauren Book Protection Act) and imposed mandatory 50-year sentences on those who knowingly sexually assault individuals with disabilities. When his local-residency restrictions prohibited registered sex offenders from living, on average, 2,500 feet from schools, day care centers and other places where children gather, a colony of homeless offenders popped up under Miami’s Julia Tuttle Causeway.



Dozens of sex offenders have created a colony under the Julia Tuttle causeway bridge, living there due to zoning restrictions that leave them nowhere else to go, in Miami. Credit: Charles Ommanney/Getty

For all Ron Book has done to protect Florida's children, he carries an immeasurable grief from what happened to his family. He has never been able to read more than a few pages of the official police report, but he's pored over thousands of photos and 100 hours of video, looking for a clue he might have missed. "I probably have stayed in a state of denial about guilt. Why else would I be crying?" he says through tears. "I'll tell you about what I did wrong: I told my children, all three of them, 'The nanny is in control. Do what the nanny says. Follow her lead! Obey! Respect! Listen to her!' My middle daughter and son would say, 'She's mean to us.' And I attributed it to them simply wanting to be children. I wasn't listening. I didn't hear them. That's what I did wrong."

'The Land That Time Forgot'

"Girls and boys, why do we have rules?"



Part of Book's mission is to expose children to the idea of danger within the home early. Where many adults wait until the teen years for a talk about sex, Book fears it may be too late then. Credit: Omar Vega/Lauren's Kids

Lauren Book is standing in front of 30 kindergarteners in a colorful classroom at Glades Academy, a charter school in Pahokee, Florida. She's wearing black sweatpants, running shoes and a teal Lauren's Kids T-shirt with the organization's signature butterfly on the front, and her blond hair is pulled back in a tight ponytail. "Because rules help us stay..." She pauses. "What?"

"Safe!" the children shout back. They sit in pairs and wear matching khaki pants and collared shirts—one of a few sets of uniforms the school gives each child at the start of the school year.

"Yes, rules help us stay safe. I'm here today to talk about some of my favorite rules to help all of you stay safe, OK?"

In unison: "OK!"

Book is almost monomaniacally focused on keeping children safe. In her sweet, high-pitched voice, she asks the kindergarteners to close their eyes and imagine what a

stranger looks like. “Is your stranger tall or is your stranger short?”

“Tall!”

“Is your stranger a man or a woman?”

“Man!”

Book asks about his eyes (“Angry!”), nose (“Pointy!”), mouth (“Mean!”) and clothes (“Messy!”). Then she asks what he’s holding.

“Guns!” shouts one boy. “A knife!” says another. “An ax! A shotgun!”

“Now let me ask you a question, boys and girls,” Book says. “Am I a stranger?”

“Nooooooooo!”

“No? When did you meet me?”

“Today!”

“How many minutes ago? Like, five minutes ago! Why do you think that I’m not a stranger?”

“‘Cause you’re nice and pretty!” says one girl.

“No pointy nose! No knife!”

“Boys and girls, let me tell you something. I am a stranger! Just because I have neat hair, that doesn’t mean I’m not a stranger. A stranger is just someone you don’t know well. Can you tell if someone is good or bad from how they look on the outside?”

For the first time all morning, the room goes silent.

Book hasn’t come to preach about stranger danger; she talks about trusted adults and what children can do if someone makes them feel “icky, confused, scared or not quite right.” These are important, although rare, lessons here at Glades Academy.



Lauren Book gives a presentation to students at Glades Academy, a charter school in Pahokee, Florida. During her lessons, she tries to impart to children that they need adults to talk to that they can trust, and that the danger is not always from an archetypal figure in a van with promises of candy. Credit: Omar Vega/Lauren's Kids

Surrounded by thousands of acres of sugarcane, Pahokee is a place where churches abound and poverty reigns. In 2009, the Palm Beach County Economic Development Office announced that Pahokee had **reached** “Depression levels,” with 32 percent unemployment—nearly three times the countywide rate. All that for a city that’s just an hour west of glitzy Palm Beach.

“This is the drug and sexual abuse capital of the world out here,” says Don Zumpano, principal of Glades Academy. “These children, the great majority of them don’t have fathers in the house. The mothers or the grandmothers raise them as best they can. As far as parent participation, it’s just hurting. I don’t know exactly how to explain it.... It’s the land that time forgot.”

Dr. Z, as the students call Zumpano, has worked as a special educator for over 40 years, the last 10 at Glades Academy. “What we do here is not all about reading, writing

and arithmetic,” he says in the privacy of the teacher’s lounge. “It’s a lot of socialization. Feeding the kids. Buying them clothes.”

He lets out a full-bellied sigh when I ask if abuse is a problem among his students, then tells the story of a boy who came to school with a large burn on his stomach. It looked to be the size of a curling iron. Zumpano struggled to contact the boy’s mother—many parents in the community work multiple jobs, or have disconnected phone lines, or don’t have transportation to get to the school. When he finally reached her, she said she had no idea why her son had a burn on his skin. “We did the best we could,” he says.

Like Book, Zumpano’s childhood inspires his work. “My mother raised four boys by herself. So I know what...” he pauses. “I was once one of these kids,” he says, eyes filling with tears. He stares at the ground, then quickly stands up, apologizes and walks out.

Down the hallway, Book and the Lauren’s Kids team help the kindergarteners come up with three trusted adults (what Book calls their “Trusted Triangle”). “How do I spell Grandma?” one asks. “How many M’s in Mom?” asks another. In the back row, a girl with braids is zoning out. VanSusteren kneels down and asks her whom she wants to put in her Trusted Triangle. The girl rests her head on her desk. “Who are the adults in your life who make you feel safe?” VanSusteren asks. The girl covers her head. “Your mommy or daddy?” The girl shakes her head no.



A student at Glades Academy, in Pahokee, Florida listens to Lauren Book's presentation and fills out worksheets as part of her lesson plan. Credit: Omar Vega/Lauren's Kids

After class, VanSusteren mentions the exchange to the teacher, who explains that the girl had just been removed from her parents' home and now lives with her aunt. It's not the first time one of Book's school visits has led to such a discovery. "I'm glad to know the teacher is in the loop, because sometimes when we've done activities like that, unsafe situations have been disclosed that were not previously known," says VanSusteren. "So many times, children want to tell you something isn't quite right, but they don't have the words to do so."

Just 10 Percent of the Problem

The myth of stranger danger—"dirty men" lurking in parks or malls, luring our children away from us with puppies and candy—is itself a danger. The reality is, the overwhelming majority of predators are in the victim's family photo album or social circle. Ninety percent of children who are sexually abused know their abuser. A **2000 study** found that family members account for 34 percent of

people who abuse juveniles, and acquaintances account for another 59 percent. Only 7 percent were strangers.

Yet conversations about child sexual abuse often focus on horrific examples of stranger danger. We find comfort in searching registries to find out whether registered sex offenders live in our neighborhoods. We tell our children not to talk to strangers. And we label men and women who abuse children as monsters. This demonizing of strangers is extremely dangerous, considering that 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 5 boys are sexually abused by the time they turn 18, and **around 90 percent** of individuals with developmental disabilities will be sexually abused at some point.

“We have an idea that I would know [a sex offender] if I saw one, and I can avoid it and keep my child away,” says Karen Baker, director of the **National Sexual Violence Resource Center**. “We need to get over the idea that we can tell who’s a good and bad person.”

The Catholic Church sex abuse cover-up and the Jerry Sandusky case, in which the former assistant football coach at Pennsylvania State University was convicted of sexually assaulting 10 boys, prove just how wrong that notion is. So do two more recent revelations: Former U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert allegedly paid a former student millions of dollars to cover up allegations of sexual abuse, and Josh Duggar, the eldest son on *19 Kids and Counting*, TLC’s popular Christian family values reality show, molested five girls when he was a teenager, including four of his sisters.

“It’s a hard idea to keep in the forefront of your thinking,” says David Finkelhor, who directs the **Crimes Against Children Research Center** at the University of New Hampshire and has been researching child victimization and family violence for nearly 40 years. “You can’t be interacting with your neighbors and then thinking all the time about whether they’re molesting your kids.”

The good news is that, for more than two decades, the rate of child sexual abuse has been declining in the U.S.

Between 1992 and 2013, the number of cases fell 64 percent, according to a **study** headed by Finkelhor. Costly criminal justice initiatives—like sex offender registries, community notification and civil commitment—are often credited for this dramatic change, but Finkelhor argues that “these came online after the decline had already started.”

Still, those big-ticket criminal justice efforts tend to get all the money and attract all the headlines. Yet these initiatives, Finkelhor says, “mostly pertain to people already identified and arrested—and only about 10 percent of new cases of abuse involve someone who has a prior record. Even if you lock up everybody who had been convicted of an offense, you’d only be taking care of 10 percent of the problem.... We need more prevention and treatment in this area, but that costs money and legislators don’t want to do that.”

Sex offender registries, for example, demand huge fiscal and human resources, yet “the abundance of research appears to say they aren’t really successful,” says Levenson, who has met more than 2,000 sex offenders in her 25 years as a licensed clinical social worker. “However, they are successful in making people feel safer.” By comparison, sex offender management and prevention programs receive far less funding.



Some experts have argued that sex offender registries only serve to help citizens feel safer, but end up fostering situations like the camps under the Julia Tuttle causeway bridge, and set up offenders to fail in their effort to rehabilitate back into society. Credit: Charles Ommanney/Getty

“Wouldn’t it be better to stop child sexual abuse before it starts? Everyone says yes, and then I hear we don’t have the money for that,” says Elizabeth Letourneau, director of the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. “We have money to spend millions of dollars on [prosecuting and punishing] sex offenders, but no money to prevent these things from occurring in the first place.”

‘I Am Fearless’

By 10 a.m., the hot Florida sun is beating down on all of us—Book, the Lauren’s Kids team, the pack of walkers. It’s the 22nd day of Walk in My Shoes, and we’ve all but stopped traffic on a local road in Bradenton, Florida. Behind us rolls Book’s souped-up bus, a confection of pink, teal and white with a gigantic photo of Book emblazoned across the side and the phrase “Walk in My Shoes: Come Walk With

Us.” Miley Cyrus’s pump-up anthem “Party in the U.S.A.” blasts from its speakers.

Some days, the walk attracts hundreds of people. Today there’s about two dozen, and Book cycles through the small crowd like the Energizer Bunny, introducing herself to newcomers and hugging walkers who have become part of the extended Lauren’s Kids family. Everyone is wearing a teal Lauren’s Kids T-shirt, each with an empty white box on the back for the person to write his or her reason for walking. “For my wife :),” says one. “I’m a survivor,” says another. Book’s T-shirt reads, “For all of our kids.”



To raise awareness for victims and sexual abuse prevention, Book walked across Florida and asked others to join her. Here she hugs a fellow walker upon crossing a finish line for the day in Bradenton, Florida. Credit:

Brian Blanco for Newsweek

A tall, beefy young man with a black bandana over his head wrote one word on his T-shirt: “Kriss,” with a heart over the “i.” That’s his girlfriend, and they’re walking hand in hand. “I was molested as a child, and I was also raped twice, so I walk for that,” says Kriss, 26, who has short blond hair with streaks of pink. “In my family, they don’t understand so they blame me. It’s OK to open up. It’s gonna

suck, but that's the first step: admitting what happened. It took me almost 10 years."

This is a familiar refrain today. Ken Followell, 57, was sexually molested by various family members starting when he was 2. The abuse continued until he was 14, and he didn't speak up about it until his late 30s. Followell was raised in a large extended family in Gary, Indiana. "They kept all the female cousins away from [one male family member] because they knew he had abused" girls before. "They never thought boys would be at risk, but he was flexible," says Followell, who is a board member and former president of **MaleSurvivor**. "Because he was a pedophile, he wasn't interested in gender. He was interested in children."

I'm walking with a young woman named Patty when we hear the indie rock hit "Pompeii," by Bastille, with its recurring chorus, "How am I gonna be an optimist about this?" She explains that she was sexually abused by her father but repressed the memories until her younger sister, then 4, told her she was being molested by their mother's boyfriend.

"I had flashbacks to what I had to endure—my mother not believing me and me having to deal with it for 10 years. It was at that point that I said, 'I'm not going to let this child go through what I went through,'" Patty says, breathing heavily. "By the grace of God, I had the strength to call [Child Protective Services] on her and take my three sisters." Patty still has custody of one of them, but the other two live with their mother. "Maybe I couldn't help all of my sisters, but one is OK."

Every person I meet during the walk has a similar story of tragedy and resilience. There's Chuck and his son, Chris, who has Williams syndrome, a genetic disability. They came up from Sarasota to walk because, three years ago, Chris disclosed that he had been sexually abused by a relative. There's also JR, a 41-year-old woman with an intellectual and developmental disability. As a child, she was adopted by

a family that treated her as a sex slave, forcing her to endure sadistic sexual, physical and emotional abuse. When Book first met her a few years ago, JR weighed 90 pounds and refused to speak to anyone other than Ninja and Ozzie, her stuffed animal penguins. Today, thanks to trauma therapy and Book's friendship, she's gained about 20 pounds and talked to me while we walked. She was one of less than a dozen people who crossed the finish line that day, and she did so holding Book's hand and saying, "I am strong! I am brave! I am fearless!"

In the evening, after walking nearly 25 miles, hosting a children's event at a bookstore and talking with families at a cookout in a strip mall, Book collapses in her bus. She wraps a pink blanket around her shoulders and places enormous bags of ice on her shins. After calling her fiancé and doing a quick FaceTime with her father, Book says to me, "Do you know how many people came to my first wedding? Eight hundred! This time, we only ordered 125 invitations." After gushing about the guy, the dress and the locale—and explaining that, in her early 20s, she was briefly married to her high school sweetheart—she tells me about two of her favorite things: "Spoelstra and Birdman," she says.



The walks take a toll on Books' legs, and shin splints are a lingering issue. But Books says she stretches and gets on with it. Credit: Brian Blanco for Newsweek

“Birdman, the movie?” I ask, because at the time I had no idea what a Spoelstra was. (Erik Spoelstra, the coach of the Miami Heat, apparently.)

She looks at me as if I had suddenly sprouted three heads. Her Birdman, I learn, is not the 2015 Academy Award winner for best picture but rather a heavily tattooed, mohawk-sporting basketball player on the Miami Heat named Chris Andersen. She explains all this, then bursts out laughing. It’s the first time in three days she hasn’t been on. (Ironically, in 2013 Andersen was **ensnared** in an elaborate Internet hoax involving underage girls and child pornography. He was cleared of all involvement.)

“The walks are so hard,” says Book, who has trekked across Florida on scorching hot days and through downpours, all with severe shin splints and other injuries. “I’m in pain, but that doesn’t matter, because that’s what matters: Being there in that moment to help set JR on a better path.... There is a greater purpose for us, with what

we're doing. It's JR. It's Ken [Followell]. It's Chris and Chuck. Just because these terrible things happen, it doesn't mean we're not still incredibly strong, powerful people. We're not damaged goods."

'Your Triggers, Your Fantasies'

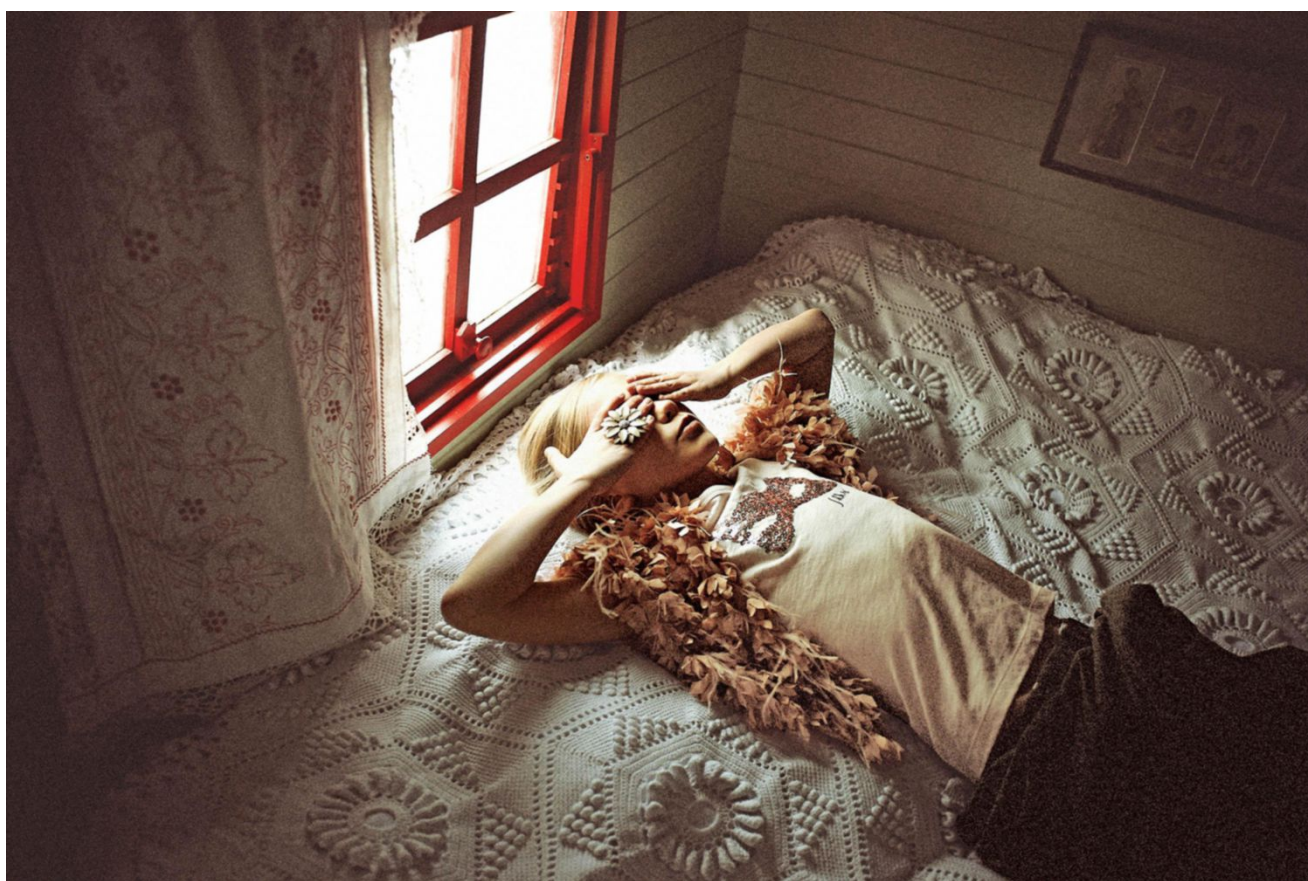
"I have five victims—two minors and three adult females. I'd walk up from behind, grab their breasts and then flee the scene." That's what Jesse says when Book asks him about his crimes. Later, we can't help but wonder whether he committed any others, because, as Book says, "you don't end up in civil commitment just for groping a few women and children."

Jesse, who is in treatment and close to being considered for release, believes in the civil commitment process. The FCCC's four-phase treatment program aims to help predators learn control. That means increasing their empathy for other people, helping them understand the factors that led them down a path of abuse, and teaching them to recognize their triggers, like drinking or feeling lonely.

"It's changed my life and changed my future," Jesse says. And he has a lot to work for: a 31-year-old daughter in Pennsylvania and a grandson, who's 5. He talks to them every day, he says, and dreams of getting better, getting out and living with them. "Success is having a support group, and they have to be fully aware of your past," he says. "They need to know your triggers, fantasies, dislikes."

Book is sitting perfectly still, listening to Jesse talk about what his life will be like on the other side. I can already tell she's concerned about his grandson—and the fact that he's putting the onus on his family to keep watch on his weaknesses, not himself. She asks him how he'll keep his grandson safe if he moves in with them. "I wouldn't trust anybody," he says. "You really need to know the people your kids are with."

The next resident we meet—I'll call him Michael—looks like a guy you'd find at a Brooklyn coffee shop wearing Warby Parkers and sporting a 5 o'clock shadow too manicured to be the result of laziness. As Book put it later, "If you met him at a Starbucks, you would have been like, 'Hmm, he's kinda cute.'" But Michael, 41, says he's spent just nine months outside of prison since 1998; it all started when he was 25 and served two years in California for what he calls "the first felony offense I was ever caught for." His victims ranged in age from 8 to 50.



Children and pre-teens are often warned about danger from strangers, but most abuse and sexual offenses against minors are perpetrated by someone they already know. Credit: Guillaume Lechat/GalleryStock

"I'm a public masturbator," he says. "As I escalated, I graduated to touch victims and masturbating when they were sleeping and unaware." The bolder he got, the less fulfilling these acts became. "I attempted to rape a woman in California. In Florida, I manipulated my neighbor's teenage daughters into watching me masturbate through a window."

"How did you do that?" Book says.

“I was smooth, charming and cool. I played on their desires to be liked, played on the fact that they liked attention from a 24-year-old guy.” One day, Michael heard someone singing a lewd song next door. “Instead of being an adult and ignoring it, I said, ‘Aha!’ I knew then I’d try to exploit the situation. I’d talk to [my neighbors’ daughters] at night through the windows.... I started getting out of the shower and dressing in my room so they could watch me.”

“Do you remember the song?”

“Something about balls,” he says. “I honestly don’t remember.”

This is Michael’s 10th year at the FCCC. He’s been in treatment for eight, and like Jesse, he links his crimes to his childhood. “I didn’t grow up in an abusive home, but my mom had a shallow emotional vocabulary,” he says. “As I grew up, I didn’t grow up.... I had secret sexual thoughts and horrible ideas. I thought what was otherwise normal behavior, like masturbating, was bad for me.” At the word masturbating, he looks us straight in the eyes. “That was my 12-year-old heroin.”

Michael wants to go to trucking school, but says leaving the FCCC “will be like a blind person seeing for the first time. This is like practice here, but only at half speed. I’ll have to get up to full speed, and that’s my fear. We’re not monsters. We were monsters.”

Our final interview of the day is with Donald (a pseudonym), who has been described as one of the five most manipulative men here. He’s the one who sends Book and her father letters complaining about Lauren’s Kids, civil commitment and the FCCC. He walks into the room wearing a checked shirt, a red tie and thick black glasses, looking like a used car salesman who woke up one day and decided to run for mayor. His gray hair is combed back, and before he sits down, he confidently reaches his clammy hand across the table and shakes Book’s hand, then mine and says, “I

want to take the time to thank you for wanting to interview me.”

Everybody—defense attorney Cohen; Mason, the FCCC lawyer; and the security guard—has intense, visceral reactions to Donald. The guard gets up from his seat near the wall and sits next to Book and Mason. Another guard comes in, says we have five or 10 minutes, max, and then stands on the other side of the room for the duration of the interview. Even Jesse, when he learned we were meeting with Donald, chuckled and covered his eyes with one arm.

When Book asks Donald why he’s at the FCCC, he says he was convicted of four counts of sexual battery, committed against his girlfriend. “I was 39 and she was 46. She discovered I had an affair. We had a 50 Shades of Grey type of relationship. I must say, the movie is disappointing.” He looks at Book when he adds, “Have you seen it?”

She shakes her head no. (“Of course I’ve seen 50 Shades, and read it, but I wasn’t going to give him that satisfaction,” she tells me later.)

Donald continues, “We had a kinky relationship. She retaliated because of the affair, and I ended up being convicted of sexual battery.”

Donald, who’s 58, has not yet been civilly committed, but if he is, he plans to refuse treatment. “It takes six to eight years. I’ll be 65!” he says. “They call this a state-of-the-art treatment center. It’s a state-of-the-art prison under the guise of treatment. I’m gonna put my feet up and retire. A gated community in Florida is one hell of a way to retire!”

Before Book and I have a chance to ask many more questions, the guards signal that the interview is over. Donald looks at Book and smiles. “Tell your dad I say ‘hi!’” To VanSusteren and me: “Ladies, thank you.” Then he raises one hand up in the air and gives us a single, solid wave.



A picture of Samantha, Chase and Lauren Book with Nanny Waldina watching them play basketball from in the background. Credit: Barcroft Media/Getty

Back in the bus, Book sits cross-legged beneath her pink blanket and picks red and white gummy bears out of a bag. “When you start the day in Pahokee with these kids who are so underprivileged and at a greater risk for a lot of things... They had never seen you and didn’t know your name, but they run up and hug you,” she says. “Then you go to the center and talk with those guys and you’re looking into evil.... You unleash that [in Pahokee]? That’s a recipe for horrific, horrible outcomes....

“Seeing these men in plainclothes sitting across from me reminds me that they are people. But they’re lions in sheep’s clothing.”



Joe Raedle/Getty

CHARLESTON AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HATE CRIME LAWS

THE RECENT CHURCH MASSACRE OCCURRED IN A STATE WITH NO HATE CRIME LAW. DOES IT MATTER?

Within hours of the shooting attack on June 17 that left nine dead in a Charleston, South Carolina, church, numerous authorities deemed the incident a hate crime. Both Charleston's police chief and mayor agreed, the FBI started investigating the shooting as such, and the Justice

Department confirmed that the shooting would be treated as a hate crime.

The general public, too, mostly agreed with that call: After all, the suspect, Dylann Roof, a 21-year-old white man who has made numerous racist comments, was seen on social media wearing the flags of formerly white-ruled South Africa and Rhodesia, and following his arrest, Roof reportedly said he had hoped to start a “race war.”

“The only reason someone would walk into a church and shoot people that were praying is hate,” Charleston Mayor Joe Riley said.

But even if hatred was the motive, the local prosecutor won’t be able to pursue such charges because South Carolina doesn’t have a hate crime law. South Carolina, along with Arkansas and Georgia, is one of only three states lacking race, religion and ethnicity hate crime statute provisions, [according to the Anti-Defamation League](#).

Jack Levin, an expert in hate crimes and criminology at Northeastern University, says there’s no blanket explanation for why those states haven’t signed on. In South Carolina, hate crime legislation has been brought up in numerous legislative sessions, including every year between 2009 and 2014, and it will no doubt be debated again soon, in the wake of one of the deadliest shootings in the state’s history. Two Charleston-based Democrats, Seth Whipper and Wendell Gilliard, are among the South Carolina legislators who have long tried to get such legislation passed, and Gilliard plans to redouble the effort. “I don’t care if they call it a knee-jerk reaction,” [Gilliard told the Charleston Post and Courier](#). “I got to do what I got to do.”

Though South Carolina has repeatedly refused to pass a law regarding hate crimes, modern hate groups in the United States have flourished since the 1990s. In 2012, the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) identified 1,018 active groups in the country. In 1998, there were only 537 such groups. Since hitting that peak in 2012, the number of active hate groups

has slowly decreased, to 784 in 2014, a number comparable to the early 2000s. The number of neo-Confederate groups on that list has shrunk since 2004, down from 13 percent to 5 percent of the total, but the number of racist skinhead groups has grown, to 15 percent of the total from 6 percent. The center also found that Ku Klux Klan groups had gone underground but not disappeared.

Roof was not immediately linked to a hate group, though photographs in his apparent manifesto indicate he has strong affection for the racist neo-Confederate movement.

This is not the 1950s when it comes to race, at least on the legislative front. But research by Spencer Piston, assistant professor of political Science at Syracuse University, suggests that Americans—including younger ones—are far from color-blind, to state the obvious. In that 2012 survey, people were asked to rate how intelligent and hardworking they considered white, black, Hispanic and Asian people. The survey found 64 percent of white, older people thought whites were more intelligent and worked harder than blacks, while 61 percent of those under 30 agreed with that statement. “White millennials appear to be no less prejudiced than the rest of the white population,” **Piston told New York magazine** at the time of the survey’s publication.



South Carolina has had many debates about whether to raise the confederate flag on its state grounds, with one side arguing that it's a cruel reminder of slavery and others arguing it's a historical legacy of southern independence. Credit: Mary Ann Chastain/AP

Even if it could be argued that racism and hate groups have diminished in America, awareness of the horrors they can perpetrate has grown, and specific punishments for hate crimes have taken on an important symbolism and often bring a harsher sentence. When someone is convicted of committing a hate crime, the original charge may be enhanced in court: A murder can become an aggravated murder; a second-degree felony may be increased to first-degree felony.

The FBI defines a hate crime as “a traditional offense like murder, arson or vandalism with an added element of bias.” This applies to cases involving race, color, religion or place of origin. In 2009, President Barack Obama expanded the federal hate crime law, applying it to acts of violence motivated by gender, sexual orientation and disability. “This federal statute becomes very important, especially for trying cases in states like South Carolina,” Levin tells Newsweek.

While the federal government can pursue hate crime charges against Roof, who has reportedly confessed to the killings, South Carolina can try him only for nine counts of murder and one count of weapon possession, in the absence of a hate crime law.

Because of the nature of the crime, local prosecutors are likely to ask for the death penalty, and Governor Nikki Haley has made it clear that is what she wants. Because South Carolina already has a death penalty on the books, it is much easier to pursue this sentence at the state level. That's why it is likely the state will handle the case instead of the federal government. "There will be conversations between the federal government and the state of South Carolina over how this individual should be prosecuted. The parties may decide the state is better to go ahead with it," says Mark Pitcavage, director of the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism.

Roof could be prosecuted at both the state and the federal levels, Pitcavage told Newsweek. "A federal hate crime law could come into play here," he explains. "In some cases, both the state and federal government prosecute; a notable example of this is with the case of Terry Nichols."

Nichols, one of the Oklahoma City bombers, was convicted twice, once in federal court and, because that jury failed to vote for the death penalty, a second time by the state of Oklahoma, which also failed to impose the death penalty. Though this could happen in Roof's case, experts agree it is unlikely.

South Carolina's prosecutors could follow a strategy similar to what was used in the Boston Marathon bomber trial, in which one jury convicted Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and a second set the sentence, Levin says. If a second jury in the Charleston case were to come back with a death penalty sentence, it is unlikely the federal government would proceed with hate crime charges.

In some cases, it's a matter of making the symbolism of the punishment fit the offense. Hate crimes "don't necessarily affect just the person and the people close to them. They affect an entire community," Pitcavage says. "In some cases, if it's high-profile enough—which I think this shooting is—it affects the entire country." Recognizing hate crimes in a court of law may also allow communities—and in this case, all those in the country affected by the shooting—to heal.

Experts also point to the potential impact of prosecuting a hate crime. "If you just say shooting someone is a murder, that is one thing, but to prosecute it as a hate crime, that gives you a better chance of, hopefully, discouraging people. [Charleston] is an aggravated case. It should be treated as such," says Randall Kessler, a Georgia-based attorney. He notes that hate crime prosecution can be seen as the highest form of intolerance toward hateful acts.

"What we have here is a hate crime that South Carolina cannot officially recognize as such," Pitcavage says. "They have no way to give respect to the victim by charging the suspect with a hate crime, and that is a shame, as it is symbolically significant. It will be recognized that they are victims of a crime, but not victims of hate."



Reuters

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ISIS? BUSH OR OBAMA?

**THE RISE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE HAS BECOME A
MAJOR ISSUE IN THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN.**

In May, Jeb Bush was signing autographs after a town hall meeting in Reno, Nevada, when a 19-year-old college student challenged him. Bush had just blamed the rise of the Islamic State, better known as ISIS, on President Barack Obama's decision to withdraw troops from Iraq.

But the student, Ivy Ziedrich, a political science major at the University of Nevada, disagreed, saying the group's evolution began much earlier—with former President George W. Bush's invasion of the country. “Your brother,” she said, “created ISIS.”

Jeb cut her off. His brother, he argued, implemented the surge that restored stability to Iraq—and it could have continued, if only Obama had left some troops on the ground. “We are in a much more unstable place,” he said, “because Americans pulled back.”

The testy exchange captured a growing debate among Republicans in the 2016 presidential race: Whose policies led to ISIS? And how would the candidates deal with the world's most notorious jihadi group? After some awkward **stumbles**, most Republican candidates have settled on a simple, self-serving narrative: Obama is to blame because ISIS's ascent occurred on his watch. Not surprisingly, administration officials disagree; like Ziedrich, they point to President Bush's missteps.

Yet the story of ISIS's rise is far more complex, former U.S. officials and Middle East analysts say. While both Bush and Obama deserve some blame, ISIS could not have become such a battle-hardened, well-funded jihadi group without the help of leaders and sympathizers in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and the Sunni monarchies of the Persian Gulf. Their support for ISIS—over Washington's objections—underscores the limits of American power and influence in the region. As Douglas Ollivant, a former director for Iraq on the National Security Council for both Bush and Obama, puts it: “We Americans are the supporting cast, not the lead actors.”

Ending the Occupation

ISIS's precursor, Al-Qaeda in Iraq, emerged in 2004 to resist the American occupation. Led by Abu Musab Zarqawi, a Jordanian, the group consisted of Sunnis, many of them disgruntled former Iraqi soldiers left without paychecks

after the Bush administration disbanded the Iraqi army. Using suicide bombers and improvised explosive devices, Zarqawi and his recruits attacked American troops and Shiite mosques in a bid to expel American soldiers, foment a sectarian war and establish an Islamic caliphate in Iraq.

The group suffered some major setbacks early on. In 2006, the U.S. killed Zarqawi in an airstrike. A year later, the American surge began as U.S. troops joined forces with Iraqi Sunnis who had grown disillusioned with Zarqawi's brutal, fundamentalist ideas. By 2008, the surge and the Awakening—as the Iraqi effort is commonly known—had driven Al-Qaeda militants into neighboring Syria, quelling much of the violence in Iraq. Bush then negotiated an agreement, which was approved by the Iraqi parliament, giving U.S. forces permission to remain in the country until 2011, along with immunity from arrest and prosecution.

That approval proved temporary. As the U.S. prepared to send the bulk of its troops home, Obama began negotiating a similar accord. His goal was to leave behind 5,000 soldiers to train the Iraqis and help with counterterrorism. But the negotiations didn't go well. Not only did Muqtada al-Sadr, the fiercely anti-American Shiite cleric, threaten to unleash his militia on any remaining U.S. troops, but the new government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was forced to acknowledge that most Iraqis wanted the occupation to end.

“Having foreign troops in your country is...an unnatural act,” says James Jeffrey, who served as Bush's deputy national security adviser and Obama's ambassador to Iraq. “Giving them legal immunity is...even more unnatural. Because Iraq was a now parliamentary democracy, this required parliamentary approval. And parliament was simply not willing to give it.”

With time running out, Obama ended the negotiations. By the end of 2011, all American troops were out of Iraq, and the president ran for re-election partly on his pledge to

end the Iraq War. Soon afterward, however, al-Maliki, a Shiite, launched a sectarian campaign against Iraqi Sunnis, arresting senior officials for treason, driving others into exile and upending the fragile sectarian balance the U.S. occupation had enforced.

Three years later, al-Maliki had so thoroughly alienated Sunnis that when ISIS fighters began to slip across the border from Syria, they found a receptive ear in some Sunni areas for their anti-Shiite beliefs. Last summer, when ISIS troops swept into the country's northwest, Iraqi soldiers ran away, and Sunnis greeted the militants with the traditional Arab gifts of rice and flowers. "I can't prove that [the sectarian balance of power in Iraq] wouldn't have fallen apart anyway," says Elliott Abrams, Bush's senior Middle East adviser on the National Security Council. "But I think we would have had a much better chance had we left, say, 10,000 troops on the ground."

A residual U.S. force might have produced a better-trained Iraqi army and generated better intelligence on ISIS. But other analysts scoff at the idea—now a Republican campaign mantra—that such a force would have stopped ISIS. "The Iraqi sectarian divides, which ISIS exploited, run deep and were not susceptible to permanent remedy by our troops at their height, let alone by 5,000 trainers under Iraqi restraints," Jeffrey wrote in a Wall Street Journal op-ed.

Ollivant, now a national security analyst at the New America Foundation, agrees: "Do I wish that President Obama had kept more focus on Iraq? Sure I do. But...these events are largely beyond his ability to shape."

Too Brutal for Al-Qaeda

While some analysts are skeptical of Obama's ability to stop ISIS in Iraq, they do believe he could have done more to stop the jihadi group in Syria. With the exception of Rand Paul, virtually all of the Republican presidential candidates have torn into Obama for "dithering" about Syrian President Bashar Assad. And several former Obama

administration officials agree; they say the U.S. should have backed moderate Syrian rebels at the beginning of the war, when ISIS and other Islamist groups were weak. “The ISIS that we know today is a product of Syria,” says Jeffrey. “And that’s Obama’s fault.”

Middle East analysts note that the surge and the Awakening weakened Al-Qaeda in Iraq but didn’t kill it. Those who fled across the border into Syria joined forces with the Nusra Front, the local Al-Qaeda affiliate. By 2012, both Al-Qaeda groups had begun playing a central role in the war against Assad, which was quickly becoming a bloody stalemate.

Because Assad is supported by Iran, Sunni officials and wealthy patrons in Turkey and the Persian Gulf emirates began funneling money and weapons to the rebels; they saw them as defenders of the Sunni heartland against Iranian Shiite proxies. Before long, the Iraqi militants established an identity separate from Al-Qaeda, calling themselves the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS. And they quickly started using border tolls, extortion and captured oil fields to fund their efforts.

These fighters weren’t only among the strongest of the Syrian rebels; they were also the most brutal. So brutal, in fact, that Al-Qaeda’s central leadership in Pakistan severed ties with them, citing the group’s beheadings of captives along with theological differences. Last year, the group declared a caliphate in the territories it controlled and began a sophisticated social media campaign to recruit members.

Today, despite enduring 10 months of airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, ISIS remains in control of vast swaths of territory, and some say the U.S. bombing campaign has indirectly strengthened Assad by attacking his enemies. Earlier this month, retired General John Allen, the top U.S. envoy to the anti-ISIS coalition, **said** Iranian-trained Shiite militias will be needed on the ground to recapture territory in Iraq. And Robert Ford, who resigned as ambassador to Syria last year

in protest against Obama's Syrian policy, recently **warned** that such indirect cooperation with Iran will only "play into the Islamic State's narrative and will help its recruitment."

Perhaps. But Obama defenders, such as Phil Gordon, who recently stepped down as his top Middle East adviser on the National Security Council, offer a sobering take on the complicated realities in the Middle East. "[T]he U.S. has no good options," Gordon writes in an **essay** in Politico Magazine. "Some of the proposed remedies for the region's woes, such as U.S. military intervention in an effort to 'transform' or 'remake' the region or simply to impress our foes, would likely make things worse. This should be clear from the U.S. effort to do so in Iraq just over a decade ago."

Andrew Bacevich, a former Army colonel and now an author and military historian, agrees. As he put it in the recent **PBS documentary** Obama at War: "When we talk about moral obligations, there's also a moral obligation, it seems to me, to take history seriously, to learn from one's mistakes."

'They Told Him to Fuck Off'

That's a lesson most Republican presidential hopefuls seem to be ignoring. South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham has pledged to send 10,000 troops back to Iraq, while Florida Senator Marco Rubio has proposed deploying U.S. special forces to help defeat the jihadi. Jeb Bush hasn't said how he would handle ISIS, nor has Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton. But virtually no one in the race has embraced Obama's strategy, which calls for up to 450 more military trainers to join the thousands already in Iraq.

Their reluctance to do so flies in the face of public opinion. In 2013, when Obama sought congressional authorization to bomb Syria after Assad used chemical weapons against civilians, the president was unable to summon more than 100 votes in both the House and Senate. "The American people did not want to get involved in the

Syrian war,” says Ollivant. “And when Obama tried to lead them there, they told him to fuck off.”

Little has changed. According to a **McClatchy-Marist poll** published in March, most Americans support the current, limited air campaign against ISIS, but they’re ambivalent about deploying large numbers of U.S. ground troops. Absent another major terrorist attack at home or an Iranian dash for a nuclear bomb, that means Americans may balk at backing another sabre-rattling candidate like George W. Bush—whether it’s his brother or anyone else.

“We’re still suffering from Iraq shock,” says Ollivant. “It’s hard to see how a presidential candidate sells another war to the people.”



Alessandro Gottardo

TWO NUMBERS: LITTLE HOPE FOR AMERICANS WITH RARE DISEASES

DESPITE REGULATIONS MEANT TO SPEED UP RESEARCH, THERE IS STILL TREATMENT FOR ONLY 7 PERCENT OF RARE DISEASES.

Approximately 30 million people in the U.S. and 350 million people worldwide are living with conditions so rare they are understudied, untreated and, in some cases, even unrecognized. In the U.S., a disease is considered rare if it afflicts fewer than 200,000 patients, and there

are an estimated 7,000 rare diseases, many of which are hereditary and caused by genetic mutations. They are often degenerative to one or more systems of the body, and many are fatal.

Pharmaceutical companies have historically been slow to develop treatments for these complex conditions. The money is in blockbuster drugs for top killers like heart disease, not in treatments that may benefit only a few hundred patients. This reality leaves millions of people with these conditions—called orphan diseases—without options. Half of these patients are children who won't live long enough to celebrate their fifth birthday.

In 1983, Congress addressed this challenge when it passed the Orphan Drug Act, meant to encourage drug research and development for rare diseases. Under the law, pharmaceutical companies that develop an orphan drug can market and sell it exclusively for seven years. Additionally, the law required the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to help design clinical trials that allow patients easier access to experimental treatments; the idea was to speed up the approval process.

“At that point in time, it was felt that investigators didn't really understand how to develop a study with a small population, in which patients were spread out within a relatively large area,” explains Stephen Groft, senior adviser to the director of the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences, a division of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

According to the FDA, 10 treatments for rare diseases were approved in the decade before the law passed. In the first 10 years after the law passed, the FDA approved 93 therapeutic drugs for orphan designation. Currently, there are 494 total FDA-approved treatments for orphan diseases. Groft says the NIH is currently supporting 9,400 projects with \$3.6 billion dedicated to advancing progress in this area of medical research.

In recent years, tenacious families and patients who lead fundraising efforts and communicate directly with the NIH, FDA and scientists have helped push along much of the research on rare diseases. “The patients, families and patient advocacy groups have really become research partners, along with the scientists and pharmaceutical companies,” says Groft.

The broader medical science move toward targeted treatment should help too. The completion of the Human Genome Project in 2003 has also benefited this patient population, since many rare diseases are the result of faulty DNA. In addition, government-led efforts such as President Obama’s Precision Medicine Initiative (unveiled earlier this year) and the 21st Century Cures Act (legislation approved in May by a committee of the U.S. House of Representatives) are meant to encourage collaboration, patient involvement and push the idea that modern medicine isn’t a “one-size-fits-all” venture.

But in the meantime, though many families continue to hold out hope that a cure will be found overnight, Groft says in many cases researchers simply need more time. “I think we often find the science isn’t ready yet,” says Groft. “We don’t understand the disease enough.”



Anthony Behar/Sipa USA

DONALD TRUMP: THE BILLIONAIRE FOR BLUE-COLLARS

WHY THE SULTAN OF SELF-PROMOTION CAN SWAY THE GOP'S WHITE WORKING CLASS.

When Donald Trump announced his presidential bid earlier this month in front of a crowd of supporters and hired actors, he gave it The Full Donald. There was his escalator-to-podium descent at the midtown Manhattan Trump Tower, with Melania, his model wife.

There was his trademark braggadocio: “I will be greatest jobs president that God ever created.” And there was his truculent talk on trade that’s at the center of his campaign: “When was the last time anybody saw us beating, let's say, China in a trade deal?” Trump said. “I beat China all the time.”

With his preternatural self-confidence and king-size comb-over, it would be easy to dismiss Trump as a showman (which he is). But the bloviating billionaire could be an important player in the Republican presidential primaries even if he never wins a single contest.

For starters, he has plenty of money—maybe not the \$8.5 billion net worth he claims on the one-page statement of assets and liabilities he recently released. But the 69-year-old certainly has enough to complicate the race. He can deliver a fusillade of negative ads, crippling others while promoting his agenda.

In two months, he’s also likely to make the cut for the first Republican presidential debate. (The Fox News broadcast in August will have the 10 candidates who poll highest nationwide.) Just by being on that stage, Trump could scuttle the presidential hopes of more established politicians like former Texas Governor Rick Perry or Ohio Governor John Kasich simply by keeping them off it. And while onstage, he could make the other candidates squirm and cringe, berating them as “losers,” one of his frequent barbs, and remaining unfazed by their retorts. What are you going to call The Donald that he hasn’t already heard? An egotist? Wrong?

But the most important reason Trump matters has to do with a significant shift in the Republican Party: the influx of white working-class voters. Many of them have been devastated by the loss of manufacturing jobs, and they could be receptive to Trump’s anti-free-trade message.

The decline of white blue-collar support for Democrats isn’t new, but it has accelerated. It began during the late

1960s, with the backlash to the rise of the counterculture, and was perhaps best captured by *All in the Family*, the popular 1970s TV show about a conservative, white working stiff. In the 1980s, the rift expanded as so-called Reagan Democrats abandoned the New Deal coalition. In the 1990s, it slowed as Bill Clinton won back many of these voters, thanks in part to his ability to seem tough on welfare, crime and the death penalty.

But since 2000, driven by issues like gun control and coal regulation, white working-class voters have abandoned the Democrats in greater numbers. Only 33 percent of noncollege-educated white voters—the best proxy pollsters have for the white working class—supported Barack Obama in 2012. In the 2014 midterms, 64 percent of noncollege-educated white voters favored Republicans. “You are talking about people who are deeply alienated from American life, both culturally and economically,” says Ronald Brownstein, a political analyst who has written extensively on the subject.

These new blue-collar Republicans are more skeptical of free trade than the right’s traditional base is. And that’s created a major shift in the party. A Pew Research Center study in May found that Republicans, more than Democrats, believe free trade agreements cost them jobs, which bodes well for Trump since the leading Republican candidates largely support free-trade agreements. Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz voted for fast-track authority for the Trans-Pacific Partnership—an essential step for ratifying the agreement—although on Tuesday, Cruz said he wouldn’t back fast-track, insisting he wanted, among other things, amendments that would limit immigration in future trade deals. And Jeb Bush and Scott Walker support it. Others oppose the deal, mainly due to the secrecy involved in the negotiations. But none are as vocally opposed as Trump.

His free trade position isn’t Trump’s only appeal to Republican voters; he’s also in line with most of the GOP’s

base on entitlements. A majority of voters in both parties oppose reducing programs such as Medicare and Social Security. Not surprisingly, whites who haven't gone to college tend to be adamantly opposed to slashing the safety net.

Still, Trump is vulnerable on a key GOP issue: taxes. He threatens to raise taxes repeatedly—not income tax rates but tariffs on products from countries he believes aren't playing fairly with the U.S. If Ford built an automotive plant in Mexico rather than the States, he said at his announcement, he would slap a 35 percent tax on cars from that facility. The threat, he said, would make the automaker keep jobs in the U.S.

Raising tariffs isn't the same as raising income tax rates, which Trump and all of the GOP candidates oppose. But it's still a tax. If there's anything that unites the diverse strains of Republican voters, it's opposition to higher taxes, even import duties. And the dreaded T-word could easily prove to be a distraction for The Donald and diminish the allure of his more popular policies. Supporting quotas on imported goods, as opposed to tariffs, is one easy way for Trump to get around this dilemma.

Many noncollege-educated whites are also evangelicals, and it's hard to see Trump's family story playing well in small-town, fundamentalist churches. In 1990, the New York Post ran a headline saying The Donald's then-girlfriend boasted that Trump gave her the "Best Sex I Ever Had." In some settings, that might be cause to boast, but probably not at the Iowa caucus. Then again, Trump has declared his support for traditional marriage, and he's had three of them.

The billionaire real estate mogul clearly isn't a perfect Republican candidate, but he doesn't have to win to be important. In 1992, Ross Perot took 19 percent of the vote in the general election. His platform was simple—and similar to Trump's. Perot adamantly opposed free trade and claimed his business acumen would turn the economy around. His

eccentricity and penchant for conspiracies was also part of his appeal; much like Trump's obsession with Barack Obama's birth certificate, the Texan claimed George H.W. Bush tried to ruin his daughter's wedding.

If Perot could win 19 percent of the vote in a general election, who's to say The Donald can't get 5 to 10 percent in critical Republican primaries, perhaps dimming the chances of other anti-establishment candidates such as Cruz or hurting a tough-on-immigration front-runner like Walker? Thanks to his anti-free-trade message, Trump doesn't need his name on the White House to play a role in deciding who lives there next.



Baz Ratner/Reuters

INSIDE ISRAEL'S SECRET WAR IN SYRIA

A TRIAL IN THE GOLAN HEIGHTS OFFERS A WINDOW INTO HOW ISRAEL IS DEALING WITH VIOLENCE ACROSS THE BORDER.

It was a random, friendly encounter between a soldier and a convicted terrorist. In February, Sudki al-Makt was driving through the Golan Heights, a mountainous plateau that Israel has occupied for decades, when he arrived at a military base near the Syrian border. An Israeli soldier

came out to ask him to turn around, and the two struck up a conversation.

A resident of the Golan and a supporter of Syria—Israel’s longtime enemy—al-Makt, 48, spent more than two decades in prison for plotting to attack Israeli military bases. Three years ago, when he was released, he allegedly intended to help the Iranian-backed Syrian regime in Damascus and its Shiite Lebanese ally, Hezbollah. The Israelis, he believed, were working with Sunni Islamist rebels across the border, and al-Makt allegedly set out to prove it.

The soldier he met that day, Hillal Chalabi, 19, was in his first month of service in the Golan, and he and al-Makt had something in common: They were both Druze, members of a small monotheistic religion that derives from Shiite Islam and whose adherents live mainly in Israel, Lebanon and Syria. Most of the 120,000 Druze in Israel are citizens and serve in the military. In the Golan, however, many refuse to accept Israeli citizenship and remain loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.



A protest in the Druze village of Majdal Shams in Israel. The Druze in Israel called on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, shown in the placard above, to protect their relatives. Credit: Ammar Award/Reuters

During that brief conversation, al-Makt allegedly turned the young soldier into his informant. He told him that the Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's militant group in Syria, was threatening Druze on the other side, and that to save them, he needed Chalabi's help. The soldier gave the older man his phone number, and later that day al-Makt called for his first tip. Several injured Syrian rebels, Chalabi allegedly told him, were crossing into Israel for medical treatment—a policy Israel says is purely humanitarian. Chalabi allegedly told him where to wait to film the Israelis transporting injured rebels to a hospital.

That evening, al-Makt came to the lookout point with a video camera and two friends. The footage, which later aired on Syrian TV, was dark and failed to capture anything concrete. But al-Makt and Chalabi allegedly stayed in touch, and nearly a week later they made plans to meet again.

That meeting never happened. Soon afterward, Israeli authorities arrested them, and the details of their relationship are described in an indictment against al-Makt, whose trial

opened in Nazareth in June. He is charged with espionage and other security-related offenses for publishing reports on Facebook and YouTube about the Israeli army's activity in the Golan and allegedly contacting Syrian officials with promises of secret information. The trial touches on one of the most sensitive questions in the Middle East today: Is Israel cooperating with the Syrian rebels in the Golan Heights in the war against Assad? And if so, how? Why? And with what groups?

Much of what the indictment calls "secret Israeli army activity" is blacked out in the document, and al-Makt's lawyer declined to comment. But Yamin Zidan, his former attorney, who wasn't allowed to represent him at the trial because he lacked security clearance, believes the full indictment, if disclosed, would reveal what Israel is really up to in Syria. "The conversations," he says, "show the level of cooperation between Israel and the rebels against Assad."

'50 Shades of Black'



Smoke rises on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights near a border crossing. Credit: Ronen Zvulun/Reuters

Since the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011, many observers believe Israel has been bombing arms shipments from Iran, Assad's ally, as they've passed through Syria en route to Hezbollah in Lebanon. But Israel denies supporting any side in the brutal conflict.

Since February 2013, however, the Jewish state has provided medical care to injured Syrians. So far, 1,600 of them—most badly injured—have been treated in hospitals in northern Israel. The effort has produced uplifting stories of injured Syrian children saved by Israeli doctors. But the majority of patients have been young men of military age, and as the al-Makt trial shows, their affiliation with the various rebel groups remains shrouded in secrecy.

Since 1974, a United Nations peacekeeping force has been stationed in the Golan Heights to monitor the cease-fire between Israel and Syria. For the past year, most of the peacekeepers have been stationed on the Israeli side after Nusra abducted a U.N. battalion from Fiji in Syria (they were later released). In their [latest report to the U.N.](#), the peacekeepers mentioned several meetings along the border between armed Syrian rebels and Israeli soldiers. They saw the Israelis take injured Syrians into their vehicles and load rebel trucks with sacks. What was in those sacks remains unclear, but Israeli sources, speaking in an off-the-record briefing, say the contents included food and blankets for the winter.

The U.N. report doesn't specify which rebel group the Israelis were helping. As in other areas of Syria, figuring out who the rebels are is often a complicated process. The groups that have operated along the border range from secular nationalists such as the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to Islamist radicals like Nusra and its splinter groups. There's also a low-level ISIS presence. But the main force operating in the area, Israeli sources say, is Nusra. "What we have on the other side is 50 shades of black," said an Israeli senior army official recently, on the condition of anonymity,

referring to the black flags used by Nusra and other Islamist groups.



A nurse in Israel treats a severely wounded Syrian at the Western Galilee Hospital in the northern city of Nahariya. Credit: Baz Ratner/Reuters

What the Israeli military will say on the record is that it is offering medical care to injured Syrians. Over the past year and a half, for instance, Israeli doctors at the Rebecca Sieff Hospital in Safed have treated around 500 of them. “If you ask me whether we are treating Nusra fighters, I can tell you honestly—I don’t know,” says Dr. Salman Zarka, the hospital’s director. “We don’t ask them which group they belong to, and if we ask how they got injured, it is to differentiate between a blast injury and a penetrating one. We don’t care who our patients are—we just try to save their lives.” The Israeli military says it has a kind of “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy when it comes to the injured fighters and assumes radical Islamists will not feel comfortable getting treated in Israel. The doctors I met say a few rebels demanded to be sent back once they discovered they were in Israel.

Until recently, Zarka was a colonel in the Israeli army and ran a field hospital along the border to treat injured Syrians. He is Druze, the first to be appointed as a hospital director in Israel, and is well aware of the rumors circulating in the area. “Many in my [Druze] community ask me, ‘How can you help the same people who may shoot our brothers across the border?’” he says. “But what should I do, let a man die? Even if there were a Nusra fighter sitting right here, with a bullet in his abdomen, should I shoot him again? Or as a doctor, should I save his life? To me, it’s clear, and the fact that Israel is treating its enemies is proof of the country’s real humanitarian commitment.”

I met four rebels in May on the first floor of the hospital in a room overlooking the Jordan Valley and the Golan Heights. The entrance was closed, and an Israeli soldier kept an eye on who went in and out. One of the young men had pins and screws in both legs and says he was a fighter for the FSA. His legs, he says, were broken, and he asked to be taken to an Israeli hospital because local doctors couldn’t treat him properly. “I was protecting our village from Assad’s forces,” he says. “[I] was injured in a bombing from a plane.” The young man, who asked that I not use his name, says he was looking forward to returning to the battlefield.

‘A Jungle on the Other Side’



In Israel's Golan Heights, residents can see smoke rising from the Syrian village of Ahmadiyah. Credit: Baz Ratner/Reuters

After I left the hospital, I drove north along a narrow road to Majdal Shams, a Druze village nearby. The area is mostly dry and mountainous, with a smattering of extinct volcanoes, some of which house Israeli army bases. As I drove, I occasionally heard explosions and saw smoke rising from the ground on the Syrian side. Sometimes the fields caught fire from the mortars.

As I drew closer to Majdal Shams, the fighting seemed to intensify. Not far from Hader, the Syrian village directly across the border, I heard machine gun fire and saw tracer bullets. The Druze live on both sides of the border, and many of the same families reside in the two villages, separated only by an electronic fence.

Unlike most Druze in Israel, who serve in the army, many of the Druze in Majdal Shams have long been supporters of Assad. But the war has begun to change that, especially among younger villagers. Today, the village is divided between those who support Assad and those who back the rebels. One reason is the regime's brutality.

Another is Israeli protection. “Deep down, everyone here knows that they owe their security to Israel,” says Dolan Abu-Saleh, the head of the Majdal Shams municipality. Abu-Saleh says Israeli authorities promised they will protect Syrian Druze if Nusra or ISIS attacks Hader. “There is a plan to evict residents of Hader here to Israel, to safety,” he says. “There are understandings, and Israel knows how to make sure that Nusra does not attack Hader and the other Druze villages around.” To him, this is comforting; he has family on the other side, and in Syria Islamists have kidnapped, killed or forcibly converted Druze.

Saleh Tarif, a Druze leader and former minister in the Israeli government, is also confident Israel will help his fellow Druze in Syria. “I can carefully estimate that Israel is using a dual approach—it has certain understandings with groups like [the Nusra Front], and it also uses its power to threaten it not to take certain actions,” he says. “It’s a jungle on the other side, and Israel has to do what it can.” Israeli officials will not confirm their Druze policy here, but have offered hints. “The [Israeli] alliance with the Druze people does not stop at the border,” Major General Amir Eshel, the commander of the air force, recently told a meeting of Druze leaders.

But in mid-June, Nusra fighters killed 20 Druze villagers near Idlib, in northern Syria. And for the first time, the Druze on the Israeli side of the border held demonstrations in the Golan Heights, publicly demanding that Israel protect their Syrian relatives. Not long after the killings, Nusra apologized, saying it regretted the incident.



Druze in Israel watch the fighting across the border in Syria. Credit: Baz Ratner/Reuters

Which is perhaps why Israel seems content with having radical Islamist militants on yet another border—at least for now: Its enemies—both the Islamists and Assad—are fighting one another, and the Druze who support the Syrian government may soon become unlikely allies of the Jewish state. “Our situation in the northern arena has never been better,” General Yair Golan, the Israeli deputy chief of general staff, said in early June. “Throughout Syria and Lebanon, there are international jihadi organizations which do not act against us and are busy fighting Assad, Hezbollah and Iranian forces.”

Yet the situation along the border is still in flux. After my visit to Majdal Shams, **fighting intensified** between the rebels and the Syrian regime. In mid-June, sirens sent thousands of Israelis in the Golan scrambling to shelters, and the rebels—it’s not clear which groups—have reportedly surrounded Hader. Since then, more and more Israeli Druze have taken to the streets, protesting against Israel’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy of treating Syrian rebels.

As the fighting continues, al-Makt remains behind bars, and the Israeli soldier who allegedly helped him will soon face a military court. The details of both trials will likely remain secret—much like Israel’s role in the war on the other side of its northern border.



David Sillitoe/Camera Press/Guardian/Redux

MEET ELIOT HIGGINS, PUTIN'S MH17 NEMESIS

A GAMING NERD'S DISCOVERY ABOUT THE DOWNED MALAYSIAN AIRLINER HAS MADE HIM AN ENEMY OF THE RUSSIAN STATE.

Sipping a can of beer and devouring french fries in a Brussels hotel room, Eliot Higgins doesn't look like the type to get involved in armed conflicts. The Englishman has a baby face, slumped shoulders and a soft Midlands accent. But over the past three years, the 36-year-old former administrator and obsessive gamer has spent hundreds

of hours scouring the Internet to find out the truth about faraway wars—from the use of chemical weapons in Syria to Russian troops invading Ukraine—all from the comfort of his couch.

Using social media posts and YouTube videos like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, he and his eight volunteers, collectively known as Bellingcat, have been able to fill in holes about what happened on various battlefields across the globe. These self-taught open-source intelligence analysts can geolocate a Facebook video of a missile launch by matching the landscape to a different image on Google Earth, or use Instagram posts to track armored vehicles as they trek across rugged terrain.

Western intelligence officials have praised Higgins's efforts (he was in Brussels to share his work with NATO), but his hobby has also made him some powerful enemies. In 2013, the Leicester native used YouTube videos to expose the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons. A year later, ISIS attacked his website after he posted the possible location of where a militant beheaded James Foley. And now he has become an enemy of the Russian state. Armies of Russian bots troll him relentlessly on social media, and Kremlin-controlled media outlets frequently denounce him. "We must be causing the Russian media to pull their hair out," Higgins says, "considering the amount of attention they're paying to us."

What has mainly provoked the Kremlin's ire is Bellingcat's work on Flight MH17, the Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 shot down over eastern Ukraine last summer, killing all 298 people on board. Russian officials were quick to blame the flight's destruction on Ukrainian forces. But over the past year, Higgins and his cohorts have been systematically debunking Moscow's version of events. With the European Union reviewing its sanctions against Russia ahead of the July 17 anniversary of the crash, Higgins is about to release a new report, "The Other Faces of MH17,"

in the hope of further discrediting Moscow's claims.

"Because the Russians are lying about so much stuff, there's so much to debunk," he says. "If they weren't...I probably would have gotten bored quickly."

The lies, Bellingcat says, started with a press conference last summer which the Kremlin claimed a Ukrainian Su-25 fighter jet shot down the passenger plane. Russia's Defense Ministry presented radar data appearing to show another aircraft in the vicinity of MH17, and the Russian Union of Engineers said wreckage indicated the plane was destroyed by heat-seeking air-to-air missiles. A man claiming to be a Spanish air traffic controller in Kiev even gave interviews to the Russian media, saying two Ukrainian fighter jets had followed the Malaysian plane. Then a satellite image appeared, apparently showing an aircraft firing on the airliner.

Gradually, however, each piece of this "evidence" was proved to be fraudulent. The Spanish Embassy said there was no Spanish air traffic controller at either of Kiev's airports. Experts dismissed the radar blip as falling debris from MH17. One of the Russian designers of the Su-25 stated publicly that the aircraft could not fire at a target flying at the passenger jet's altitude, and that only a surface-to-air missile could cause the plane to break apart as it did. Finally, Bellingcat exposed that satellite photo as a crude composite of Google images, with the Malaysian Airlines logo not even correctly placed on the aircraft.



Investigators watch as a piece of wreckage from the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 is transported at the site of the plane crash near the village of Hrabove in Donetsk, eastern Ukraine, November 20, 2014. Credit: Antonio Bronic/Reuters

For Higgins, the only credible theory of what happened is Kiev’s version of events—that a Russian-supplied, Russian-operated Buk missile launcher shot down MH17. It was one of those launchers, spotted by The Associated Press in rebel-held territory near the crash site, that originally piqued his interest. Ukraine’s military says the launcher was part of a complex anti-aircraft defense system Russia has been building in eastern Ukraine since last summer. “In June, three Buks arrived, situated near Donetsk, in Torez and to the north of Novoazovsk,” says Oleg Zakharchuk, deputy chief of Ukraine’s air force. “[Our planes have] a radar warning receiver system, and our pilots on patrol were exposed to the radar’s activity from time to time. The pilot could see in his cockpit that he was within the area of a Buk’s activity. That was exactly the area the Boeing went down.”

Never without a Plan B, Russia switched to an alternate theory—MH17 was hit by a Buk missile, but it was launched

from Ukrainian territory and fired by troops loyal to Kiev. Once again, the Kremlin offered satellite images to back it up. But Bellingcat purchased its own satellite images, again indicating the Russian ones had been digitally altered. Russia's Ministry of Defense did not respond to telephone or email requests from Newsweek for comment on Bellingcat's findings.

"The Russian propaganda technique is to flood the Web with huge amounts of misinformation in an effort to undermine genuine facts," says Vitaliy Naida, a senior official at Ukraine's state security service. "The aim is to constantly raise new questions and make absolute truth seem unattainable."

Higgins says he's experienced the Kremlin's strategy firsthand. In recent months, Russian state media outlets have hounded him for interviews and called him a coward for refusing to talk. Some critics say he's a CIA agent. Others believe he helped overthrow the pro-Kremlin government in Kiev during the Euromaidan revolution. Higgins maintains his group is independent. "We have a software engineer at Microsoft, a law student, even someone who was in the Stasi [East German secret police] 25 years ago," says Higgins. "We have people from Finland, Poland, Holland, Germany and the U.S."

One reason for the Kremlin's unwelcome attention is that Higgins is no longer content to simply debunk Russia's claims. For months, Bellingcat has been geolocating social media posts to trace the movements of the Buk missile launcher seen by The Associated Press. The trail led from rebel-held eastern Ukraine back to its base in Russia, so the researchers scoured the social media profiles of Russian soldiers from the unit they believe crewed the launcher. "We've collected over a hundred social media profiles of soldiers in order to reconstruct the unit," Higgins says, "establishing who's who and who was in the convoy that transported the MH17 Buk towards the border with Russia."

For the first time, Higgins and his team say they're going to put names and faces behind the tragedy. They've handed the information over to a team of investigators from the Netherlands, Malaysia, Australia, Belgium and Ukraine, who are leading a criminal inquiry into the crash. Investigators say it's still too early to comment on the Bellingcat report, but didn't rule out the possibility that it could contribute to witness subpoenas, extradition requests and prosecutions. "We're familiar with the report," says Wim de Bruin, a spokesman for the Netherlands' Public Prosecution Service, "but we need to establish for ourselves the cause of the crash in a way that we will have enough evidence to go to court, to point to suspects and see whether it's possible to trace and to prosecute them."

Back in his Brussels hotel room, Higgins is emphatic that no one needs to take his word for it, that the evidence against the Kremlin speaks for itself. "There's so much debate about what Russia is actually doing, but we can say, 'Look: Here's the evidence. Here are the photos. Here are the videos. This is what Russia is up to.'"



Chaiwat Subprasom / REUTERS

DNA SLEUTHING REVEALS ELEPHANT POACHING HOT SPOTS

**ANALYSIS OF SEIZED TUSKS HELPS SCIENTISTS TRACK
ILLEGAL HUNTING TO TWO KEY AREAS OF AFRICA**

African elephants are in trouble. Poachers kill about 50,000 of the animals every year for their tusks, which are fashioned into ivory trinkets that collectively fetch several billion dollars. This greatly imperils the future of the world's

largest land mammal. Only around 430,000 are left, and around 10 percent are killed off annually.

But policing is tough. How do you protect an animal found across enormous expanses of land in sub-Saharan Africa?

New research shows that the task may not be as overwhelming as it sounds. **Sam Wasser** from the Center for Conservation Biology at the University of Washington and colleagues examined DNA from tusks seized by customs officials around the world from 1996 to 2014. They then matched those with a map of elephant genes, which they constructed by taking 1,500 DNA samples from elephants across 29 African countries.

This allowed them to determine where the seized ivory came from, as they describe in a study **published** June 18 in the journal *Science*. To their surprise, they found that poaching appears to be concentrated in two areas. For forest elephants, poaching is centered on the so-called TRIDOM (Tri-National Dja-Odzala-Minkebe) protected ecosystem, which spans northeast Gabon, northwest Democratic Republic of Congo and southeast Cameroon, Wasser says. For savannah elephants, which live on the eastern and southern plains of Africa, Tanzania is the primary hot spot for poaching and the more important of the two, he adds. The discovery “means we can now target these areas” rather than spreading resources thin over a wider area, Wasser says.

Indeed, in Tanzania, the population of elephants has **declined by 60 percent** in the past five years. Absurdly, the government **claimed** earlier this month that much of the drop could be explained by “migration.”

“Tanzania really is ground zero for poaching and trafficking,” says **Crawford Allan**, senior director with the World Wildlife Fund’s wildlife trade monitoring network, called **TRAFFIC**. The results of this recent study suggest that there is a relatively high level of corruption in that country, Wasser says, and that those in the international

community seeking to protect elephants should vocally demand change from Tanzania's government. Perhaps, he adds, they should consider withholding aid to the country until certain conditions are met.

Foreign money could also help spur change in other ways. **Lazaro Nyalandu**, Tanzania's minister of natural resources and tourism, recently said in a statement that "elephants are at the top of the 'wish list' for many tourists who come to this country, and tourism generates over 17 percent of our gross domestic product." And in fact, the ministry, along with environmental groups WildAid and the African Wildlife Foundation, just launched a public awareness campaign to inform the public about the poaching "crisis" facing the country.



Moley Robotics

GOOD TO THE LAST BYTE: FOOD GETS DIGITIZED

**GET READY FOR THE COMPUTER THAT SERVES
MANKIND...TACOS.**

We've been hearing ad nauseam about driverless cars. Next up will be the cookless kitchen.

There's a lot of stuff simmering in that realm. Investors have been **pouring money** into "food tech" startups the past couple of years. Entrepreneurs are turning spicy phrases

like, “The new restaurant is no restaurant.” Stanford MBAs, applying the kind of spreadsheet thinking that they might use to improve the efficiency of a supply chain, are talking about how they’re out to reduce our “time to meal.”

That all may sound a bit overheated, but to be fair, the technology of the meal hasn’t profoundly changed since the introduction of the microwave oven in 1955. As data, artificial intelligence and robotics intersect in the home, the everyday meal is ripe for disruption. The room we call the kitchen might end up becoming as quaint as a fireplace—nice to have but not necessary.

These grand schemes to change the nature of cooking help explain some of the vertiginous valuations of recent food-tech companies. **Munchery**, for instance, lets customers order freshly prepared meals using a mobile app. The chilled meals are delivered in about 30 minutes, then you can throw them in the microwave or refrigerate for later in the week. While that may sound like it’s barely more clever than pizza delivery from Domino’s, Munchery just raised another \$85 million, valuing the company at \$300 million. (Krispy Kreme’s market cap is only about four times that much.) Startups with names like Blue Apron, DoorDash, HelloFresh and ChowNow are getting similarly large investments. In 2014, U.S. food-tech companies raised more than \$1 billion, and India, Europe and China have all become sizzling regions for food-tech startups.

If the end goal were just newfangled food delivery, the investment surge would look like bubble-driven investor looniness. But remember: Facebook was once an online college yearbook—nobody knew it was going to change the nature of social circles. Maybe some of these companies will bring about a similarly profound transformation in meals.

If you stir the pot a little, you can see how new technologies will come together to change cooking. Take a U.K.-based company called **Whisk**. It was started by Nick Holzherr, who is somewhat famous in the U.K. because

he first pitched his idea on that country's version of *The Apprentice*, getting turned down by its Donald Trump-ish host, Lord Sugar, who huffed: "Who could be bothered with it?" Whisk, for now, is an app that automates shopping lists on your phone. A user can find a recipe online, throw it into Whisk, and the app will add the items needed to the list. You can refer to the list while at the grocery store, or in some markets use it to automatically order from a delivery service.

Behind that simple idea, Holzherr has a bigger one: As Whisk gathers data about recipes, ingredients and user tastes, the company plans to develop a "food genome"—a nod to Pandora's **Music Genome Project** that breaks down the traits of songs. As Holzherr explained to me, once Whisk has data about food and user taste preferences, it can make matches—like a food discovery service. You might tell Whisk that you want to try a new Indian dish that's under 600 calories, and it could present a recipe geared to what it knows you like.

As meals go digital, companies like Whisk and Munchery will learn a great deal about ingredients, recipes, trends and their customers' tastes. That will change the way we buy and eat food, much as Pandora and Spotify are changing the way we try and buy music.

Technologists are also working on the mechanics of cooking. A couple of former Apple developers have created an oven called **June**, which is supposed to recognize the food placed in it and cook it perfectly. The company says June is a "computer-based oven that thinks like a chef." It's also a step toward a kitchen that can cook by itself.

At Asia's Consumer Electronics Show last month, Moley Robotics **showed** off its automated kitchen. The thing looks like someone cut off Robocop's arms and stuck them on a kitchen counter. For now, the system is only a very sophisticated mimic—it has to record a human chef's actions, then it can cook the meal if the ingredients are precisely placed in predetermined spots, all within reach of the arms. In a way, it's not a huge advance over Dick Van

Dyke's mechanical **kitchen** in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. But systems like this will get smarter and more flexible, using artificial intelligence to learn how to make meals and figure out where to find the ingredients. Add up the various inventions like this and June that are in the works, and the robot cook starts looking more real and not just like a labor-saving daydream of a nerd with 10 kids.

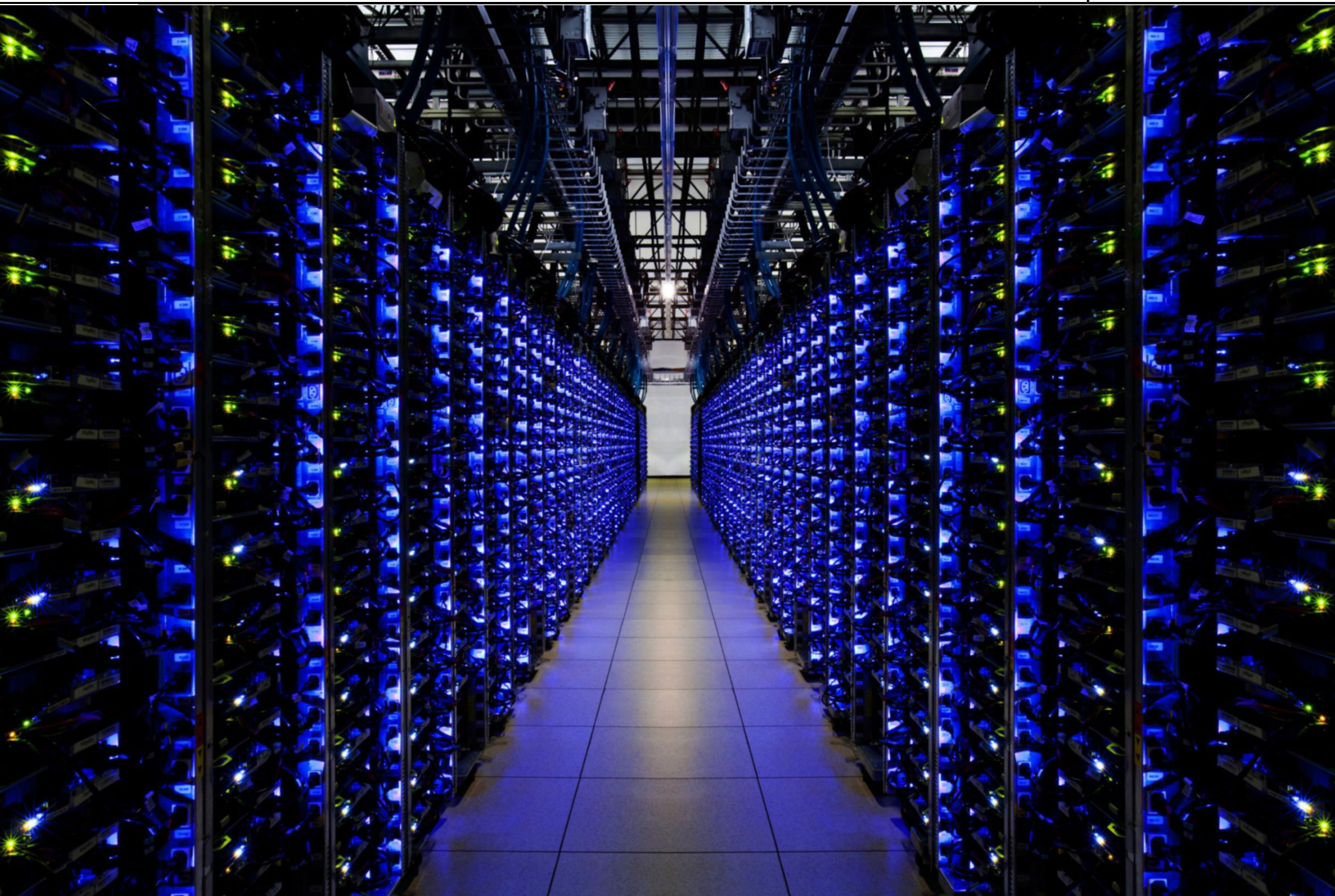
Throw IBM's Chef Watson into the mix too. As a way to show off the Watson computer's capabilities, IBM fed it truckloads of recipes from around the world, along with data about ingredients and how their chemicals react to one another. The machine develops recipes no one has ever created, sometimes for good reason, unless a beef burrito with chocolate and edamame sounds good to you. The computer even has its own **cookbook**, Cognitive Cooking With Chef Watson. The bottom line: A machine can now think up recipes.

We're clearly on a path toward some kind of machine that will know just about everything there is to know about food combinations, and it will be able to assemble intimate knowledge of the tastes of the people it will serve. Robotics are getting so good, so quickly, there's no reason to think robot cooks won't make their mark first in high-volume food preparation enterprises and, later, homes. Swizzle together a robot chef plus food data and artificial intelligence, and you have a home cook that can be as good as any celebrity chef—or your mother.

Then we might wonder about the nature of the kitchen. Maybe the best way to automate cooking will be to build a kitchen suited to robots instead of humans—like a self-enclosed, self-cleaning unit of stoves and arms and blenders that sits in the basement and sends finished plates up through a dumbwaiter. (Or in 2025, it probably will be a smart-waiter.) People who really want to cook will be like people who really want to do their own woodworking. Instead of a human-scale kitchen as a default room in any house, it

will be something you have to choose to install, like a wood shop.

Puts a whole new spin on the techie **catchphrase**, “Software is eating the world.” Guess we’ll end up kind of eating software.



Connie Zhou/Google/ZUMA

STORING DIGITAL DATA FOR ETERNITY

INNOVATIVE STORAGE SOLUTIONS, FROM DNA TO SILICA GLASS RECORDINGS, COULD ENSURE WE NEVER ENTER A DIGITAL DARK AGE.

Vint Cerf is sometimes called the “father of the Internet.” He helped develop TCP/IP (the communications protocol for the Internet) and later became chairman of ICANN (the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, i.e., the people who make domain names and IP addresses). But today he worries we’re heading into a digital dark age.

“People think by digitizing photographs, maps, we have preserved them forever,” he says, “but we’ve only preserved them forever if we can continue to read the bits that encode them.”

Save a file—on a thumb drive, say—and several years later, your computer (and your friends’ computers) might not even know how to read it. The company that makes those USB drives—or the software that read them—may have long gone out of business, the engineers elsewhere or long-passed. It’s happened to the best of us, and the best of the U.S.: In 1975, NASA launched Viking 1 and Viking 2, two deep space probes to Mars. The agency’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory recorded information from the mission on a magnetic tape in a format that was state-of-the-art. But just 10 years later, no one at NASA had the skills or software to “read” it, and up to 20 percent of the Viking mission data was lost forever.

The moral is to be skeptical of the promises of technology. Services like Google Drive and Dropbox store all your data “in the cloud.” That sounds pretty numinous, but all it means is that your doc is saved on one of Google’s many servers. Now, if you end up stymied by USB obsolescence—or even if you spill coffee on your computer keyboard and fry it—as long as you can get onto Google Drive, you can access your documents. It feels awfully secure, but there’s no guarantee that it’s forever. Google could go out of business or sell off servers to someone who decides to wipe them clean. If the company were to shut down Google Drive, it would likely give customers ample time to move their data elsewhere. But what happens if you aren’t around to follow the instructions? Morbid as it is, imagine passing away, with your photos and files on the drive, password-protected and probably forgotten. Who’ll tend your inbox after you die?

Compounding the problem: Digital equipment, compared with clay or paper, isn’t very durable. Hard drives, flash

drives, floppies and CD-ROMs all lack serious longevity. Servers, for instance, have to be replaced about every five years. Leave a server farm alone too long and its stored data will degrade and become inaccessible at a pace much faster than that of its analog predecessors.

That's why several projects are underway to build a form of storage for digital data that doesn't degrade. Peter Kazansky and his partners at the University of Southampton, for example, are working on molding silica glass into what is, for all intents and purposes, an infinite storage device. The glass, modified quartz, is one of "the most stable materials on earth," says Kazansky. In normal conditions, it can store data for billions of years.

The silica glass is costly, says Kazansky: A bare 5-inch silica glass disc is about \$500. The ultrafast lasers used to record the data on the disks also come with a hefty price tag: \$100,000. Kazansky hopes his storage glass will eventually be produced at a commercial scale; he says the price "could be reduced 10 to 100 times in mass production."

Kazansky hopes his invention will eventually be used by "national archives, museums, libraries" and private organizations with a lot of data. "Companies have to back up their archives every five to 10 years because hard-drive memory has a relatively short life span," he says. Contrast that with the copy of the Bible that Kazansky and his team have recently recorded in glass: Kazansky predicts the recording will "survive the human race."

Meanwhile, the Japanese engineering conglomerate Hitachi has also begun to develop its own method of recording digital data on glass; company representatives say their product can store data for 100 million years.

But both Southampton and Hitachi are stymied by a problem that, in classical digital storage, was solved a

long time ago: space. Hitachi and Southampton's storage mechanisms both top out at 40MB per square inch. That's better than a CD (which can store a max of 35MB in the same space) but not nearly as good as a standard hard disk, which can hold at max a terabyte per square inch.

One promising proposal comes from inside your body. At great magnification, your DNA—or that of any other living organism—looks like a lovely double helix composed of four organic molecules. You might remember them from high school biology: adenine, guanine, thymine, cytosine. What's interesting about A, G, T and C is that they can be rearranged in patterns to represent language—English or Mandarin, Python or Swift—much like the way we used dashes and dots—in Morse code—to send sentences across countries.

Because DNA is such a tightly packed array of code, it can outcompete all conventional storage: It can hold a mind-blowing **700 terabytes per gram**. **Bio-artist Joe Davis**, for example, **recently used synthetic biology to stick a DNA-encoded version of the entirety of Wikipedia inside an apple**. George Church, the chemist who invented DNA encoding, has stored 70 billion copies of his book, **Regenesis**, in a drop of synthetic DNA smaller than the period at the end of this sentence. Under ideal conditions, says Church, those books will last 700,000 years: To give a sense of that time scale, the first printed book, the Gutenberg Bible, was produced just 560 years ago.

Right now, the process is too slow to be practical. With current-day sequencing technology, one can read, at most, 12.5GB per day from DNA; that's about 16 hours of film, which sounds like a lot until you consider how fast your current-day computer can download a movie (hint: It doesn't take an hour to process 90 minutes of screen time). In addition, both writing and reading DNA-encoded data require complex machinery that only a few specialized labs

can access, and it's just as subject to human and natural volatility as NASA's magnetic tapes.

Long Now, a nonprofit organization for data preservation, may have a solution that could help our information survive a digital (or other) apocalypse—and maybe even help our survivors rebuild. The Rosetta is a 3-inch disk of nickel laser-etched with 13,000 page's worth of linguistic information. Much of it is made up of parallel texts—the same words in lots of languages, sort of like the project's archaeological namesake. For example, the Rosetta includes the first three chapters of Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, written in 15,000 different languages. “We're not a religious organization,” says Laura Welcher, the Rosetta's curator. But they needed to find texts that were written in as many languages as possible—even those least commonly found around the world—in order to create the most comprehensive translation keystone possible for future generations. “It turns out that there are missionaries around the world who are working on Bible translations,” says Welcher. The rest of the Rosetta library includes “the 3,500 books most essential to sustain or rebuild civilization.”

Currently, each page of the project is 400 microns across—about the width of five human hairs. That sounds small, but compared with DNA, it's gigantic. It can be read with a standard optical microscope that uses the same magnifying techniques we've been using for hundreds of years. “We could have put the information on the disc at a much higher density—made the pages much smaller so you'd have to read them with an electron microscope, says Welcher, “but it takes a long time for a society to get to the point where they can magnify to that extent.” In other words, even come apocalypse, Rosetta will be readable.

Long Now is also looking to help documents withstand the more mundane threat of “I can't read this floppy!” type of digital “darkness.” The group is developing the Long Server, an ever-growing database of file-conversion

resources. Got a bunch of old .pcx files you'd love to convert to .jpgs? Long Server's Format Exchange can help you out.

Cerf, who started this conversation, wants to do Format Exchange one better: He's called for the creation of "digital vellum," a technique for packing and storing digital files along with all the code that's needed to decrypt them. Example: If you store a document made on Microsoft Word on an Apple Computer running OS X 10.8.5 as a piece of digital vellum and open it in 100 years, whatever machine you have that can decode computer data will have all it needs to take you back in time. It would be able to reconstruct that same Apple computer, build and run OS X 10.8.5 and whatever version of Word you installed on it, and open the document exactly as it was.

If you've ever used a program like Boot Camp to emulate Windows on a Mac computer, that's more or less what digital vellum would be like, except instead of emulating a current OS, you'd be emulating a system from a previous century—from the chip structure on up.

One thing's for sure, though: If we want to get this done, we'd better start soon. Digitization has created an environment where we can now produce an enormous amount of data—90 percent of all data ever generated by human beings has been created in the past two years, according to IBM. Safeguarding even a fraction of that information could give us the richest historical record the human race has ever known. Failing to preserve that information would mean that the records of one of the most innovative eras in history could be lost.



TIPS/ZUMA

SAVING LAOS FROM GLOBAL WARMING

THOUGH THE COUNTRY IS DEVELOPING FAST, THE RICE FARMERS THAT MAKE UP ITS BACKBONE FACE AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE DUE TO DEFORESTATION AND EXTREME WEATHER.

Every May, when commercial airline pilot Benja Henderson flies in and out of Vientiane, the capital city of Laos, he has to navigate a perennial hazard: rockets flying over the great Mekong River.

These projectiles are not the products of battle, despite the area's history of sky-borne destruction—a covert war waged by the CIA brought over 2 million tons of ordnance down on Laos between 1964 and 1973. They're part of an ancient agrarian ritual. At the height of Laos's dry season, says Henderson, flight paths are modified as thousands of villagers up and down the country fire ballistics at the troposphere during boun bang fai, or rocket festivals. The rockets—PVC tubes packed with charcoal, bat excrement, sulfur and sometimes more than 250 pounds of gunpowder—are meant to provoke the irascible sky god Phaya Thaen into stirring up storms and nudge him to honoring a rain-sending pact he made with the Toad King, an incarnation of the Buddha.

Rocket festivals are a reminder that the fragile relationship between agriculture and climate in Laos is imperiled. From the riverine paddies to the limestone karst, Laos' subsistence farmers—about 80 percent of the rural population—depend on getting the right amount of rain at the right time. But in recent years, changes in global climate have resulted in long dry seasons, and then short, intense rainy seasons that drown cropland. Flooding destroys around 60,000 hectares of rice in Laos annually, and that number is expected to rise. Rigorous International Water Management Institute analyses of Mekong basin rainfall from 1953 to 2004 showed a trend of longer dry seasons, and wet seasons with shorter but more intense bouts of rainfall.

Extreme weather in Laos isn't just destructive; it's deadly. In 2011, the Southeast Asian floods destroyed over 140,000 homes in Laos, leaving nearly 430,000 homeless, and killed at least 30 according to the U.N. In 2013, floods killed 20 people.

On a recent Sunday in Phognern Village, less than 10 miles outside of Vientiane, guards with rifles slung over their shoulders ushered garlanded Hyundai trucks past vendors selling scouring pads, laundry detergent and kitchen

knives. Some trucks carried rockets in 30-foot-long bamboo cases. On one truck, a monk sat atop stacked speakers that blared mor lam, the Laotian country music popular in the region; farmers in drag followed another truck, thrusting wooden phalluses at the sky.

Under the eaves of a stilt house set back from the highway, Khanjana Ounmany pours rice whiskey for friends seated on plastic lawn chairs. “The fields are very dry, and the water from the river is not enough. That is why we need to ask for rain,” he says through an interpreter. Khanjana, who now works for an architecture firm in the capital, had come home to celebrate boun bang fai with his family. As he toasts the start of the planting season, a loud crash sends drinkers scampering under the awnings as a rocket lodged in the gap between two aluminum roofs scatters burnt plastic onto their plates of fried grasshoppers and bowls of duck-blood soup.

Phognern’s growing population and the creep of the Vientiane suburbs has scaled down the rocket festival. “Before, there were few houses and no roads. It was all rice fields,” Khanjana says. For Laotians like Khanjana and his brother Kiengkay, a lecturer at National University of Laos, development has delivered opportunities unknown to their farmer parents. Economic growth helped reduce poverty rates from 46 percent in 1992 to around 23 percent in 2013, according to the World Bank.



The annual Rocket festival in North Laos is a tradition where rockets shot toward the sky are meant to summon rain, crucial for rice cultivation in the region. Credit: Bertrand Linet/Getty

But many in the village still depend on Phaya Thaen's response to the rockets. Flooding and drought, which hit

at different times and intensities across the country's hilly topography, can be devastating to subsistence farmers, the majority of whom own less than two hectares of land. "We cannot get much yield from the rice if the rain pattern is not normal," Kiengkay says.

Climate change isn't the only threat to rural livelihoods. The spate of investment that has enabled Laos to post remarkable growth rates in its gross domestic product for the past nine years has added pressure to vulnerable systems. Between 2000 and 2009, Laotian land deals for agribusiness, mining, hydropower and other industrial development increased fiftyfold. The problem is that much of this development has clipped back Laotian forest. According to the Laos government, only 41.5 percent of the country's land area remains forested. Food and Agriculture Organization studies indicate that deforestation makes soil more vulnerable to erosion and decreases fertility.

Poorly regulated foreign investment has displaced people as well as forest. Land leases drive communities off their land without adequate consultation or compensation. There has also been government harassment, intimidation and arbitrary detention of land rights defenders who objected. One particularly troubling example of what can happen to those who speak out was the abduction of internationally acclaimed community development worker Sombath Somphone. CCTV footage showed Sombath being stopped by police in Vientiane in December 2012 and then driven off in a pickup truck. He has not been seen since. The same month, Anne-Sophie Gindroz, then country director of Swiss agricultural development organization Helvetes, was given 48 hours to leave Laos after writing a letter considered critical of the government.

But despite the political peril, many are stepping up to help Laotian farmers. Aid agencies, for example, are improving water management systems and introducing more climate-resilient rice varieties. And technologies such as the

International Rice Research Institute's prototype WeRise system—which combines real time weather forecasts with crop models and nutrient management tools to enable farmers to plant the most suitable crop at the right time—offer hope to some.

The government has a plan to increase rice production, secure land rights, introduce more climate resilient varieties and improve quality to meet the demands of the export market.

One option is to expand and modernize an ancient practice: rice-fish farming. In these biodiverse systems, fish and other aquatic creatures are cultivated alongside rice in flooded paddies. Commercialization of rice-fish farming in Indonesia and other countries has improved rice yields as well as aquatic protein for consumption and sale.

But for upland subsistence farmers who till some 400,000 hectares outside the lowland paddies that the government has earmarked for protection and development, prospects remain bleak. Michael Trockenbrodt, who runs workshops about the value of biodiversity in some of Laos's most remote areas, says farmers are left to debate why their crops are failing. "Some people say bad luck, some people say bad spirits. Some people say straight away, deforestation—that we don't have any forest anymore," he says.

Back in Phognern Village, a country band played to a crowd in a field strewn with empty beer bottles and taffeta. The last of the rockets had been launched, and revelers drank under fading vapor trails. On the horizon, thick cumulus created a haze that blocked out the afternoon sun.

Phongsavanh Phommavongsa, dripping with sweat, smearing white makeup across his cheeks, was among the dancers near the stage. "The rockets are going to work," he shouted over the music. "If the rains don't come in 15 days, you can cut off my head."



Spencer Platt/Getty

THE BRONX IS BACK TO ORDINARY, AND THAT'S PROGRESS

NO LONGER BURNING, THE BRONX IS SUDDENLY HOT.

Once branded the worst slum in America, Charlotte Street today looks suspiciously like suburban Connecticut. Let the record show that this South Bronx strip bears no resemblance to the post-nuclear wasteland visited by President Jimmy Carter in 1977, when it earned its infamous distinction. Nor the one that, three years later, Ronald

Reagan compared to London during the Blitz, except that no Luftwaffe had come to flatten the Bronx. This was not a battle but an implosion. Everyone was a victim or a captor. If there were conquerors, they were of the furtive sort, hoisting no flags.

By the time Bill Clinton visited Charlotte Street in 1997, the mood was no longer funereal. Charlotte Street had been reconstructed into a stretch of single-story houses, despair giving way to vinyl siding. “I would like every single American to see the before and after,” Clinton said. President Barack Obama has been to the Bronx, but not to Charlotte Street, for it had been tilled fully for political significance by the time he assumed office. Once the site of extraordinary ruination, then of extraordinary renewal, Charlotte Street is today an ordinary place.

On a crushingly humid afternoon this past spring, I drove along Charlotte Street with Lloyd Ultan, the Bronx borough historian, and Shelley Olson, a composer who moved to the Bronx from the Upper West Side several years ago. Ultan and Olson have co-authored [The Bronx: The Ultimate Guide to New York City’s Beautiful Borough](#), which they bill as the first enchiridion for the much-maligned borough. Their idea is a novel one: People want to learn about the Bronx, to walk its streets and taste its delicacies. People are no longer afraid.

I spent a day driving through the borough with the enthusiastic duo, in what proved a tour but also an extended sales pitch meant, I came to strongly suspect, to erode my longstanding allegiance to Brooklyn. Did I know that the Bronx has more parkland than all the other boroughs? Or that the Grand Concourse is the nation’s largest preserve of Art Deco and Art Moderne apartment buildings? Had I tasted my way along Arthur Avenue, New York’s last true Little Italy? Was I ready for the riparian secrets of City Island, the sylvan mysteries of Spuyten Duyvil? Was I ready to look at some real estate?

Their book is part of a greater effort to restore the image of the Bronx, to finally expunge the ghosts of '77, when Howard Cosell announced to the entire world that the Bronx was burning. It was only a single building aflame, but, well, details. There were other indignities, too: *Fort Apache: The Bronx* (1981), a lurid tall-tale of Bronx cops defending Western civilization against dark-skinned interlopers; *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), in which an errant foray into the Bronx topples a Master of the Universe.

But the Bronx bogeyman is not so frightening anymore. At the very least, he's learning how to monetize his famous street cred. In February, Baz Luhrmann announced that he is directing a Netflix series called *The Get Down*, which will follow "the lives and music of a ragtag crew of South Bronx teens." Luhrmann has already promised that he won't merely focus on images of decay. "At a certain point," **he said recently**, "rubble is just boring."

Cultural image often smooths the road to reality, gentrifying perceptions before a single building is gut-reno'd into a luxury living experience. *Seinfeld* made its premiere in 1989, when three times as many people were murdered in New York City as in 2014. And yet the show made Manhattan seem like a skyscraper shtetl peopled by charmingly neurotic Jews. You could probably see your kid living there. You could definitely see your kid living in the Greenwich Village of *Friends* (b. 1994), which assured millions of Americans each Thursday night that if Rachel and Chandler could make it in the big city, so could the restless young men and women of Peoria. *Sex and the City* (b. 1998) was the coup de grâce: The city was not just safe, but fabulous. Shall we have another round of cosmos?

Brooklyn's cultural gentrification has been even more impressive, given how little the borough mattered before suddenly coming to matter more than its slender sibling across the East River. Between the clothing of Brooklyn Industries, the music of Williamsburg bands like the

Yeah Yeah Yeahs and the brownstone novels of Jonathan Lethem, there congealed an image of the borough as the city's Quartier Latin, at once edgier and cozier than Manhattan. With the advent of *Girls*, even your weird uncle in Palookaville could pontificate on how lame Bedford Avenue has become.

Also in March came Arlene Alda's **Just Kids from the Bronx**, a collection of oral histories by some of the borough's most famous progeny: Colin Powell earning a quarter at a Hunts Point synagogue for flipping the lights during Shabbat; Mary Higgins Clark coming of age down the block from Jake "Raging Bull" LaMotta. Alda writes that she was encouraged in her effort by the jewelry designer Joel Arthur Rosenthal. "I'm glad that you're doing a book about the Bronx," he confided in her. "I'm sick and tired of hearing about Brooklyn."

It occurred to me that I'd just heard the exact same sentiment somewhere else: in Anthony Bourdain's CNN documentary series *Parts Unknown*, the fourth season of which **alighted on the Bronx**, along with exotic foodie destinations such as Paraguay, Tanzania and Massachusetts. "You've been to Brooklyn," the culinary explorer declares. "Maybe it's time you took a look at the Bronx."

"Boys Stone Boat, Hurt Sight-Seers," read a New York Times headline on April 21, 1958. **According to the brief article**, "a gang of juveniles" had stood on the pedestrian walkway of the High Bridge, which connects upper Manhattan to the Bronx. They threw "sticks, stones, and large pieces of brick" down onto a Circle Line cruise ship passing on the Harlem River below. Four tourists were injured, including a 12-year-old girl.

Throwing things from the High Bridge became a popular pastime, and the span closed to pedestrians sometime in the ensuing years. The city's oldest bridge, it had originally been part of the Croton Aqueduct, which supplied the city with drinking water. By the latter decades of the 20th century,

though, the High Bridge had become an apt symbol for the rest of the borough, abandoned and unloved. Navigating the tangle of highways leading out of the Bronx, you might have taken it for a vestige of better days before it disappeared in your rear-view mirror, along with the rest of the God-forsaken borough.

On a recent June morning, I watched as two competing factions walked from opposing sides of the bridge and met in the middle of the span, beneath a low and violent sky. A crowd quickly congealed around the groups; many police officers were also on hand. But this wasn't a scene out of *The Warriors*. The two rival groups were political delegations from the Bronx and Manhattan, and they met to celebrate the reopening of the High Bridge, after a refurbishment of nearly \$62 million.

Despite the incipient rainfall, a festive mood prevailed. A choir of school children sang African songs, while city workers passed out free hats. Selfies abounded, capturing river vistas long unseen. As far as infrastructure is concerned, the High Bridge's return is nothing much, but the psychological significance is great. There are more than a dozen bridges between Manhattan and the Bronx, yet they are all primarily for cars or trains moving through the borough, not into it. High Bridge is the only one that is explicitly for the residents of the central Bronx and upper Manhattan: it connects only them, offering nothing to those seeking passage to Westchester or Connecticut. It is a crucial rivet patched up and polished, made to gleam anew.

Brooklyn may define itself as the anti-Manhattan, where old timers in Bensonhurst still bemoan the "Great Mistake of '98" (i.e., the city's unification 117 years ago) and Park Slope graphic designers brag about how rarely they venture into "the city." But the Bronx is proud of its affiliation to the mother ship. "Of all the places in Manhattan's general orbit, the Bronx is (and this is its enduring strangeness) both the poorest and the least alienated. That every other place is

more distinguishable is true in part because every other place has taken greater pains to contrast itself with Manhattan,” writes New York magazine’s Ben Wallace-Wells in a graceful pean to his home borough, noting that “the blessing of proximity to Manhattan is that things conceived in the Bronx can quickly take off.”



Youths fly a kite in a street bordered with fire gutted buildings in the South Bronx section of New York City in June, 1977. Credit: AP

It is also true, however, that things can take longer to take off in the Bronx than elsewhere. The High Bridge stood in disrepair for four decades. The Kingsbridge Armory, the largest structure of its kind in the entire world, has also languished in bureaucratic limbo. Sometime in the future, it is set to become a National Ice Center, a strange and underwhelming choice for a borough where the primary sports are basketball and baseball. And while the Loew’s Theatre in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn has been gorgeously restored to its pre-war glory, the Loew’s Paradise Theater on the Grand Concourse stands covered in grime and obscured with placards, serving as the church of prosperity preacher Creflo Dollar.

This is what makes the Bronx so bewildering and beguiling. Walk the borough's streets and the feel of latent possibility lodges in your nostrils like the pollen of some strange indigenous plant. On the same block, the borough may be graceful and profane, it may curse you out or bid you good afternoon. Sometimes squalid, the Bronx is rarely grim. And though never polite, the Bronx is very much alive.

No neighborhood bears more proximity to Manhattan than Mott Haven, a single subway stop into the Bronx. It is one of those places that is more talked about than visited. Once in a while, you do meet some scruffy artist who lives there, some skinny-jeaned hipster for whom Brooklyn is lame and Manhattan is death. The South Bronx is where it's at, man, haven't you heard? A crowd will inevitably gather around him at a party, as if he'd recently escaped a North Korean prison camp. Everyone wants to know his rent.

“Goodbye South Bronx Blight, Hello SoBro,” declared The New York Times in 2005, in one of many articles (in that newspaper and others) proclaiming the looming coronation of the South Bronx as the next East Village, the next Williamsburg, the next Place Where Every Wesleyan Grad Will Yearn to Move. It must have been a long goodbye, because 10 years later another Times article hit pretty much the same themes: **“Mott Haven, the Bronx, in Transition.”**

In truth, the physical terrain of Bronxlandia isn't all that much to behold: a couple of brownstone blocks on Alexander Avenue, bookended by housing projects. On the other side of the Bruckner Expressway, there is a strip of warehouses that could pass for the set of *Girls*, though also for the set of *The Wire*. There are few trees. The air feels heavy and unclear. But gentrification is happening here, and it is real: after all, how much deeper into Queens and Brooklyn can hip and moneyed newcomers push before they find themselves on Long Island?

Certainly, the Bronx is making its entreaties to the creative classes. Last year, the Bronx Brewery opened on East 136th Street, in the Port Morris section of the Bronx, not far from the hip strip of Mott Haven. It is the borough's second brewery; there are two distilleries in the Bronx as well, **leading to what The Times has called** "a growing artisanal spirits movement in a borough." The borough is also home to two urban farms, and both sell their produce at a weekly Mott Haven farmers' market. There is **a tech incubator**, too, thus completing the holy trinity of New Urbanism.

Then again, the old adage about a rising tide lifting all boats hasn't quite come true here on the Harlem River. Two blocks away, in the Mitchel Houses, few residents can sate themselves on challah french toast at local haunt Charlie's, which looks like it has been airlifted from one of Harlem's better blocks. In 2010, this was the poorest district in the nation, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, with 38% of its population living in poverty. Childhood asthma rates are high. Education rates are low.

As I walked up Third Avenue, past a long strip of housing projects, I was struck by a strange sight: a white woman decked out in tight neon gear, jogging down the street, dodging old men with sagging bags of groceries and young women pushing strollers, her red ponytail bouncing, earbuds firmly planted in her ears. I stopped and squinted, as if a rare woodpecker had flown into my sight. Of course, if she was a preposterous sight, then so was I, Google Mapping my way through the borough, notebook in hand, like some latter-day Darwin recording the native fauna. We are part of the same invasion, radiating from the Mott Haven beachhead ever deeper into the Bronx. We are coming, and we demand brunch.

To illustrate the beauty and promise of the Bronx, Lloyd Ultan, the borough historian, likes to show a photograph from about 1890. It is an image of several men and women

in front of Cedar Jack's Last Stand Clam Bar, a thriving restaurant in Melrose, not far from where Yankee Stadium stands today. Cedar Jack is at the edge of the photograph, arm on his hips, dressed in a bowler hat and vest, looking confidently into the camera. There is one remarkable thing about the photograph: Cedar Jack is black, while all his customers are white.

As far as Ultan is concerned, the photograph alludes to the "racial acceptance" that prevailed in the Bronx. He points out that during the Draft Riots of 1863, when dozens of blacks were killed in Manhattan and Brooklyn, not a single African-American lost his life to mob rule in the Bronx. In 1943, after riots in Harlem stemming from the shooting of a black man by a white police officer, blacks who had only recently escaped the South now escaped Manhattan for the Bronx. Ethnic whites in Mott Haven set up welcoming committees, Ultan says, and many local merchants made sure that the new arrivals had jobs.

That history does have its unseemly moments, as much as Ultan would like to downplay them. We stood talking in front of the John Purroy Mitchel Houses, whose red brick towers rise like the ossified stumps of enormous prehistoric trees. In 2005, the New York Police Department arrested 43 members of a drug ring that allegedly turned the housing project into what came to be known as "Crip City." Nearby are the Moore Houses, where last year 24 alleged members of the Murda Moore Gangstas were arrested.

Several days after touring the Bronx with Ultan and Olsen, I went to see the actual Fort Apache, which is the former 41st precinct building in the Longwood neighborhood. The name may have originated in the 1960s, but it became cultural shorthand with the 1981 film starring Paul Newman as a pretty good cop in a really bad place.

Locals suspected (correctly) that their borough would be depicted as a Boschian hellscape ruled by no discernible human law. They protested, hoisting signs that declared,

“Fort Apache is an anti-Puerto Rican, anti-black movie” and “Paul Newman: From Liberal to Racist for \$3,000,000.” This anger didn’t stop filming, but Fort Apache did get a disclaimer, which appears before the movie and points out that since Fort Apache is a cop flick, it “does not deal with the law abiding members of the community.” With that out of the way, the ruin porn begins.

Today, Fort Apache is no longer in a war zone: The surrounding blocks have a sleepy, suburban feel, very similar to Charlotte Street, that onetime symbol of Bronx hopelessness. The young officer behind the desk didn’t even know the building’s legend as Fort Apache. You couldn’t exactly blame him. Last year, there were only four murders in the precinct, a full 11 times fewer than there had been in 1990.

Maybe it’s better that the young officer had no idea about Fort Apache, that his Bronx was not the Bronx of flattened buildings and roaming junkies. It may be true, as William Faulkner said, that the past is never past. But the present also has its say. And it says that in the Bronx, it is not 1977 anymore.



The Overnight

MATTHEW MUNGLE CREATES HOLLYWOOD'S PROSTHETIC PRIVATES

THE MAKEUP ARTIST HAS CREATED FAUX GENITALS FOR COMEDIES SUCH AS THE OVERNIGHT, IN THEATERS THIS MONTH

There's a buzzed-about scene in the upcoming comedy *The Overnight*, in which—minor spoiler alert—characters played by Adam Scott and Jason Schwartzman drop trou'

and dance naked by a pool. It's a turning point for Scott's character, Alex, who had been embarrassed about his penis size. It's "tiny," he says, compared to the one on Schwartzman's character, which he calls a "giant goddam horse" penis.

The Overnight **premiered at Sundance** earlier this year and will hit theaters on June 19. As is often the case with projects from executive producers Jay and Mark Duplass, the plot involves aging young couples who want to experiment. Scott's Alex and Emily, played by Taylor Schilling, go to a friend's house for dinner. The night progresses and penises make an appearance.

Viewers can thank Matthew Mungle for the film's poolside reveal. An Oscar and Emmy award-winning makeup artist, Mungle has become the go-to specialist for outfitting Hollywood's members with faux members. And as comedies go to greater lengths to push boundaries and win laughs, the pretend-penis business is thriving.

"I think it started probably about five or six years ago," says Mungle, 58. "People are trying to get that comedy factor in film. I think they're just pushing the limits." He keeps five or so penises on hand at his North Hollywood workshop. Each is worth about \$1,000, he says, or he'll make one custom for \$5,000. His man-made manhoods have appeared in comedies such as *Wanderlust*, *Get Hard*, *Step Brothers* (testicles only) and *Little Britain USA*, as well as HBO's comedy-drama *Looking*, about gay men in San Francisco. His handiwork will appear in an upcoming comedy too, he says, though he's sworn to secrecy.



Makeup artist Matthew Mungle has created prosthetic penises for some of Hollywood's funniest comedies in recent years. Credit: Matthew Mungle

Mungle finds it amusing that after some 200 film, television and stage credits, this line of work could end up being his legacy. Growing up on a dairy farm in Oklahoma, Mungle fell in love with horror movies such as *Creature From the Black Lagoon* and *7 Faces of Dr. Lao*. Working from the magazine *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, he'd practice applying stage makeup on himself and his sister. "Nobody else would sit for me," he says. Later, in college, he majored in theater, and then moved to California and studied at Joe Blasco Makeup Artist Training Centers.

He worked his way up in Hollywood and, in the late 1980s, formed W.M. Creations, Inc. with a partner. Their

facilities total 7,000 square feet, in which he and a team of artists use one space to make the prosthetics and another to store them. Hundreds of decapitated heads and other body parts line the walls. “I can’t even guestimate how many we have,” he says.

When filmmakers call to request genitals, Mungle says, the process starts with looking at pictures. Sometimes, those are adult pictures, he says. He and artists Koji Ohmura and Aurelio Guzman discuss with the filmmakers how the prosthetic should look, how big or small it should be, whether testicles should be made and whether the part should be flaccid or erect, circumcised or uncircumcised. “Sometimes when they call us, they’re like, very shy about it. I delve right into it,” he says. He uses foam latex or silicon, and for erect parts, adds wiring. If covered by underwear, Mungle sews the prosthetic into a band that goes in the costume. For full frontal, he glues hair on the top of the prosthetic, which is then glued on to “the shaved area of the actor’s crotch.” A supporting piece goes in between the buttocks and is glued to the top of the buttocks. “It’s very technical, you know,” he says.

“He was recommended as ‘the best in the biz’ at the particular niche,” Wanderlust director David Wain says by email. “I believe we said we wanted it to look ‘nice sized’ without being cartoonishly or unrealistically large.... He showed us the penis and we examined it, really got a feel for it. Then he worked with [actor] Joe Lo Truglio to make sure it fit right, wasn’t too uncomfortable and looked convincing.” Wain **recommended** Mungle to The Overnight filmmakers.

Male full frontal nudity in comedies isn’t new—There’s *Something About Mary* featured it nearly 20 years ago. But the floodgates seem to have opened in recent years, with memorable scenes in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, *Borat*, *The Hangover Part II*, ***We're the Millers*** (link NSFW), *Unfinished Business* and *American Reunion*, to name a few. For some of those, the actors went au naturel.

But using a prosthetic isn't always about the actor's comfort level; in movies such as *The Overnight*, the look of the prosthetics are critical to the narrative.

“In the case of *Wanderlust*, nudity was an intrinsic part of the story and the world, and most of the characters were naked at point or another,” Wain says. (The film takes place on a free-spirited commune.)



From left, Adam Scott, Taylor Schilling and Jason Schwartzman star in 'The Overnight.' Credit: The Overnight

For *The Overnight*, Scott and Schwartzman seem to have been pleased with their prosthetics. “My wife and I helped produce the movie, and so we kind of got to see the early images of the prosthetics,” Scott **told Newsweek** earlier this year. “There was a lot of debate: The big one should be bigger and the small one should be smaller, and I feel like we got this—kind of the perfect place with both of them.” (It wasn’t Scott’s first role that required **wearing such a part.**)

He and Schwartzman described filming the naked scene as fun and “weirdly comfortable.” “I’m the guy who will not take his shirt off at a party. And my wife walked on-set and was like, Who is this guy? Is that my husband? Prancing around like a little pony? I was just so extremely naked in

front of all these people. But it was not scary anymore,” Schwartzman told Newsweek.

The film **has an R rating for** “strong sexuality, graphic nudity, language and drug use.”

“With all film rating, context matters tremendously,” Kate Bedingfield of the Motion Picture Association of America says by email. “Prosthetic versus real generally does not, though.” Bedingfield declined to comment on the rating decisions for any particular film.

“Work is work. As long as they sign the check it’s fine,” Mungle says, laughing. “It’s a vast artistic profession and anything that pays the bills is great, basically.”



Eric Thayer/Reuters

JAMES TAYLOR'S NEW ALBUM, REVIEWED BY A PANEL OF MOMS

**"THIS MUSIC FEELS LIKE BEING AT YOGA," AND OTHER
THOUGHTS ON JAMES TAYLOR'S LONG-AWAITED
ALBUM.**

Moms love him. Dads want to be him. Kids go see him play at Tanglewood because it's a required trip at summer camp.

He's James Taylor, the humble, golden-voiced god of '70s folk-rock, and he's back after a lengthy recording break. Before This World, out June 16, is his first album of original songs in 13 years. But James Taylor has never been much of a critics' artist. ("Dean of American Rock Critics" Robert Christgau **once called him** "interesting, intricate, [and] unlistenable" and wondered: "Which god is supposed to have sent him?") So we're turning over this review to some of his real fans: a panel of moms.

My mom, specifically, and three of her James Taylor-digging friends, who gathered recently for an advance listen to Before This World. To be clear, these are average moms—that's the point. They are not experienced music critics or experts. And while they would not like me to reveal their ages here, suffice it to say that they're older than 20-something me and younger than my 70-something grandma. The panelists:

Their verdict seemed to be: This James Taylor record sounds a whole lot like James Taylor. Here's a track-by-track review.

1. 'TODAY TODAY TODAY'

Ronni: I think his music is so familiar. Even though it's a different song, it's still familiar. **Liz:** His voice still sounds really good. You could hear this in one of his older songs. **Adrian:** I'm not sure I'm that impressed with the words yet. **Liz:** Some singers sound old. He doesn't sound old. **Adrian:** I could listen to his voice all day. But I don't think that that particular song grabbed me. It doesn't matter if I hear that song again. **Risa:** It didn't speak to me. Today, tomorrow or yesterday. **Ronni:** Has he done other types of music that don't sound like James Taylor? **Liz:** He's done

cover songs. Christmas songs. But I don't think he's done other types of music.

2. 'YOU AND I AGAIN'

Liz: I think Yo-Yo Ma is on this. I think it's a love song to his wife. **Ronni:** Which one? **Liz:** Third wife! Current wife. **Risa:** I could just picture his face singing this. **Adrian:** I like this one much better than the first one. **Ronni:** I like the accompaniment! It's soft. **Adrian:** [Recalling when she saw James Taylor in college] He was very different then. He was in a very troubled time then. It was at the war memorial in Syracuse. People wanted him to play "Fire and Rain." And he refused to play it. It was this whole controversy—should he have to play it because fans wanted him to play it? He was definitely struggling with his own personal demons. I loved listening to him then too. But I find him so much more mellow a person now. And you hear it in his songs. **Liz:** He played at a college campus in the '70s when I saw him. And Carole King opened for him, and nobody wanted to hear Carole King because they didn't know who she was. He came out and yelled at the audience and said, "I refuse to come out here if you're not respectful to my friend." [Moms get nostalgic and start watching a YouTube video of James Taylor in the 1970s.] **Ronni:** Look at him! His hair! **Liz:** Now he's bald. **Ronni:** He's much mellow. That's what I take away from that song. He's just happier. He doesn't have to prove anything anymore. He's arrived. He's peaceful.

3. 'ANGELS OF FENWAY'

Liz: I don't really like this one. It's about baseball. **Adrian:** You can't like this if you're a Yankees fan.... This is going to get great cheers at Tanglewood this year. **Ronni:** I can see they're going to be playing this at every game. **Risa:** I think it will grow on me. It's OK. **Adrian:** It's a little whimsical. **Ronni:** He just wanted to do something for his own team. It's James Taylor. It's not "Go, team!" It's like [in a mellow voice] "Angels of Fenway...."

4. 'STRETCH OF THE HIGHWAY'

Adrian: It's a little bit more of a country sound. **Ronni:** It feels very much like his usual songs. They blend together for me sometimes. **Adrian:** Paul Simon and Simon & Garfunkel, they have a lot of variety. I think Billy Joel has more variety. James Taylor—you gotta love him. But there's this common familiarity. **Ronni:** They blend together. They don't stand out. But this is who he is. He's a folk singer. He's not a rock and roller. **Liz:** And people like it! They continue to like it. **Adrian:** Why mess with success? **Liz:** I saw him years ago. We were in the front row, really close. And he was just so engaging and nice. His son Ben called in on the phone to sing a song for the concert. It was really nice to see that. **Ronni:** I was at a Barbra Streisand concert, and her son sang with her. **Risa:** Barbra Streisand is going to be at Madison Square Garden at the end of June. **Ronni:** Is she really? [Conversation moves back to James Taylor.] Who among younger artists would you compare him to? **Liz:** Elliott Smith?



Musician James Taylor performs at a talk titled "Beyond Religion: Ethics, Values and Wellbeing" in Boston in 2012. Jessica Rinaldi/Reuters

Credit: Jessica Rinaldi/Reuters

5. 'MONTANA'

Risa: It's soothing! **Adrian:** It's kind of like yoga! This music feels like being at yoga. **Ronni:** Because you don't listen and sing along. You just learn the words through osmosis. **Risa:** Oh, this sounds like him. This is him. That note! **Ronni:** This feels like, "There was a young cowboy...." It just has that same exact beat and feel and tone to it. **Adrian:** It's not compelling. But it's soothing. **Liz:** Yeah. Like all of his music. **Risa:** I think this one sounds the most like his old stuff. Just the quality of his voice. **Liz:** He also has backup singers now, which he didn't used to. **Ronni:** It's enhanced. He's enhanced. **Liz:** If it was Joni Mitchell singing backup, that would be good. **Adrian:** That was just chill. It sounded like James Taylor. **Risa:** Once you hear the song over and over, you're gonna love it. It's what we love about "Fire and Rain" and "Mexico."

6. 'WATCHIN' OVER ME'

Liz: At least this music sounds a little different. **Ronni:** I don't like the backup. **Liz:** I think him alone is better. **Ronni:** To have backup singers and all that changes the nature of who he is, I think. **Liz:** I think this is one of his songs about drug abuse. He writes about it in almost every album he puts out. **Adrian:** This is a little too commercial for me.... I think I would like it better if he was singing it by himself. I feel like it's his personal message. About what he's been through. **Ronni:** He's been singing the same type of music for 40 years. He's doing what we know, but he's adding a little difference. It's not what we know, so we don't like the chorus in the background or the enhancement. **Liz:** When he's done concerts at Tanglewood, does he have the whole band? **Adrian:** In recent years, he has had other people there. I remember feeling like I enjoyed more the songs that he sang by himself and I didn't enjoy as much the ones with backup. **Ronni:** Because we're purists. **Adrian:** But that song in particular. It was what he sings. It was his message about life. And for me it got a little—it lost something for me to have the other voices in there. **Liz:** When he sings alone, he's very vulnerable when he's telling you a story.

7. 'SNOWTIME'

Ronni: I like this one. **Risa:** It's growing on me, actually. **Ronni:** It's relatable. I can feel that it's cold and snowy. You can picture what he's saying as he's singing it. **Liz:** Does it sound Latin, the music? **Ronni:** Do you know when he wrote this? This past winter, in Massachusetts, there was a lot of snow.

8. 'BEFORE THIS WORLD/JOLLY SPRINGTIME'

Me: This song features Sting. **Liz:** Yes! I'm very excited about that. See if you can hear Sting. **Adrian:** I like this so much better than the backing vocals. The harmonizing... **Liz:** This is a pretty song. **Adrian:** This song is making me want to listen more. Some of the songs have been background, and I didn't care that much. This one and

one of the others in the beginning...**Risa:** I feel like what we are [liking] is the one that was most familiar to us. **Adrian:** I disagree. The ones that were in the background—I liked having it in the background but wasn't really tuning in. This and the second song, I feel like I really tuned in to more. I would say it's not because it's familiar. It's because I'm drawn to hear what he's saying. **Ronni:** I don't usually just sit and listen to an album. I can't remember the last time I just sat and listened to an album. Usually I'm in the car and the music's playing. It's a different experience.



Pop singers Elton John, Sting and James Taylor sing together during the ninth annual Rainforest Benefit Concert in 1998. Reuters Credit: Reuters

9. 'FAR AFGHANISTAN'

Risa: I thought we were going with a theme and it was going to be about summer. **Ronni:** It's really hot in Afghanistan. **Ronni:** I've never heard him sing political, antiwar songs. It's usually about his troubles, relationships. **Risa:** I actually like this one. It's a good message. I like how it's said. **Adrian:** It's once again

telling a story. It's not hysterical or anything. But it's making a point. **Ronni**: It's funny because I don't think of him as political. **Liz**: He was going through all his drug stuff during the Vietnam War. So he didn't write about war; he wrote about his stuff. He was hospitalized, in a psychiatric hospital for a while. He said he almost died several times. **Ronni**: There are so many musicians who get out there and use their fame as a platform. Whether it's for someone running for office or to raise money for starving children. **Risa**: Springsteen does it all the time. Maybe he's just been afraid to put himself out there on that level. **Ronni**: It's a story. Not a protest. It is ultimately antiwar. But he's not saying, "Stop the war." He's just sharing what it's like. **Liz**: He also has 14-year-old sons now. That could be a reason to write a song like that.

10. 'WILD MOUNTAIN THYME'

Liz: I don't think it's an original. **Ronni**: You can picture the Irish brogue. [Speaking in Irish accent] "The lassie come together!" **Risa**: Why'd he choose to put one that's not an original of his?

FINAL VERDICT

Risa: Overall, I liked it. A lot of it did sound familiar to me. I liked the song with Sting. I thought it sounded very James Taylor-ish. **Adrian**: Most albums that I like, I don't love every song. Each song is pleasant enough, and a lot of it's background, but there are certain songs I look more forward to. I think this would fall in that category. There are a few songs that grab me more. Otherwise, I certainly wouldn't mind it being background music. **Liz**: But it's nice that he still sounds so good. I think that's really nice.

Adrian: It has to be really hard to feel like you have to come out with an album. I wonder why he even released it? Did he financially have to do this now? Or did he feel an artistic need to put out new music? **Ronni**: So the question is, Why would he feel pressure to write a new album? I didn't love the album. I liked two songs a lot. The one about

"Far Afghanistan" and the second one. The others were just—they just...blended...into...one...another. And I like James Taylor! But why did he need to write these songs?

Liz: You mean because he'll never top what he did before?

Ronni: No! It's just different words with slightly different tunes. It's fine in the background. **Risa:** He doesn't go out on a limb. It's pretty constant. **Adrian:** That's probably why we like him, because he's predictable and has been part of our lives in the same way for so long. **Ronni:** In college, I would sit and listen to Cat Stevens and Carole King. Now it's not something I sit and do. It's background music for me. And yet because my husband plays in several types of bands, I love hearing live music! I love concerts! I didn't need to sit here and listen to James Taylor singing all these songs. I would have liked to hear one or two. And then maybe somebody else.

01

BLOOD AND RUBBLE

Kabul, Afghanistan—An Afghan soldier stands near the body of a Taliban militant following an attack on the Afghan parliament building on June 22. Insurgents detonated a car bomb near the building and then tried to storm it. Lawmakers fled as the militants killed at least two people and injured dozens before they were shot dead by Afghan security forces. The assault was the latest in a series of attacks in Afghanistan, where the Taliban is on the offensive.



Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty

02

MOURNING IN AMERICA

McClellanville, South Carolina—Allen Sanders and his wife, Georgette, pray on June 20 at a sidewalk memorial for the nine people killed in a mass shooting at a historically black church in Charleston. Police arrested Dylann Storm Roof, 21, who was charged with nine counts of murder. Some civil rights advocates wonder why Roof, who allegedly hoped to start a race war, isn't being accused of terrorism as well.



David Goldman/AP

03

CROSSING THE LINE

Saint Ludovic Border Crossing, Italy— Police remove a migrant at a border crossing between Italy and France on June 16. For weeks, African migrants have come to this spot in hopes of making their way to France and other parts of Europe. Italy and France are trying to prevent the newcomers from settling in their countries, and Italian officials complain their nation is bearing the brunt of the crisis while the rest of the European Union does little to help. Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi has threatened to issue special visas to the migrants that would allow them to travel freely across the continent.



04

RIGHT MAKES MIGHT

Copenhagen, Denmark—Fed up with their country's immigration policies, Danish voters leaned rightward on June 18, voting the Social Democratic Party of Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt out of office. Former Danish Prime Minister Lars Loekke Rasmussen, right, will likely lead Denmark's new government. But to do that, he'll have to form a coalition with the ascendant Danish People's Party, a nationalist group that garnered 20 percent of the vote on the promise of tightening immigration laws, among other things. The vote came at a time when nationalist parties are surging in Europe, partly due to an influx of African migrants.

